

JACK HEATON

OIL PROSPECTOR



A. FREDERICK COLLINS



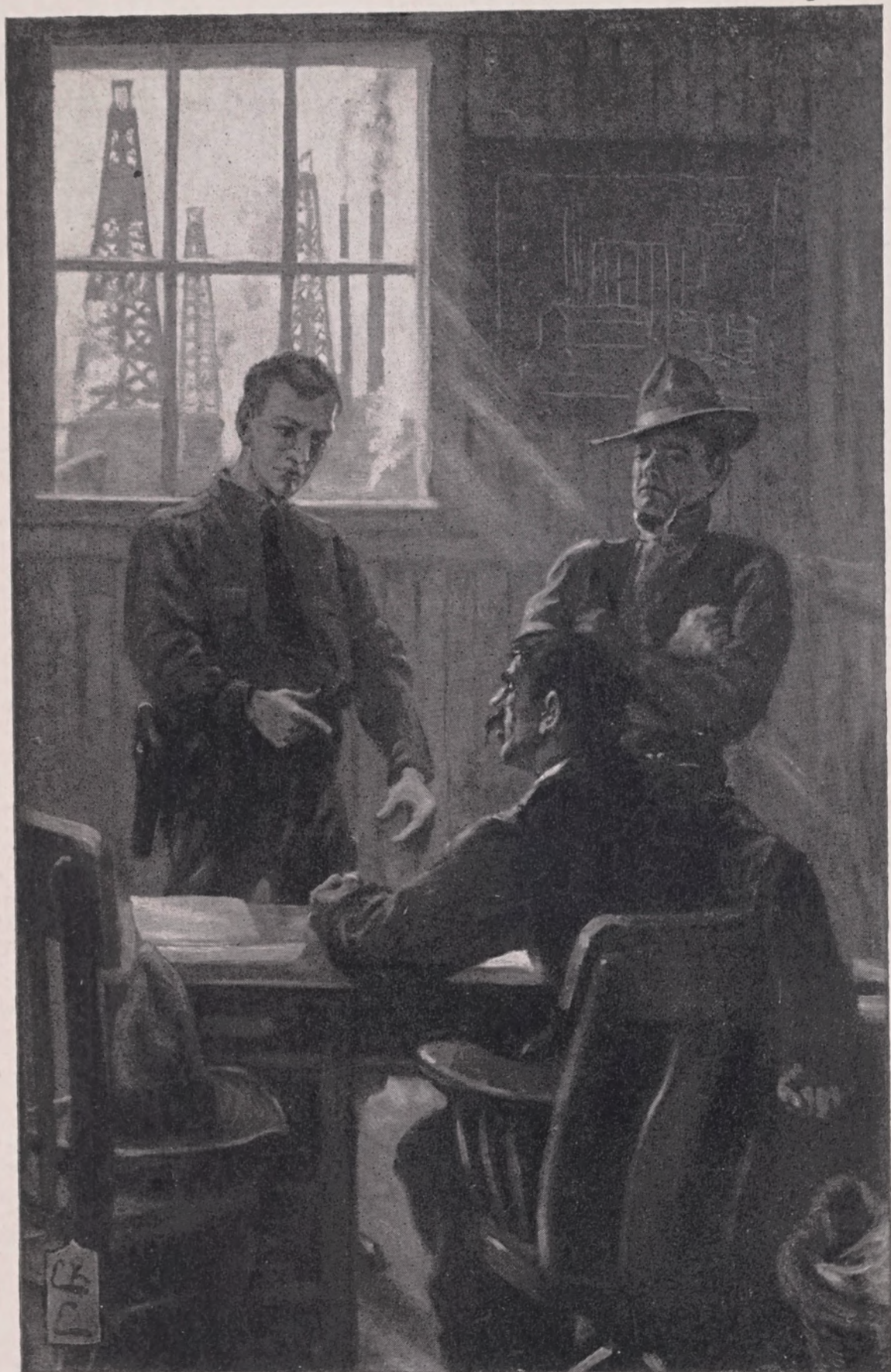
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JACK HEATON, OIL PROSPECTOR



“‘NOW WHAT I WANT TO KNOW IS WHAT YOU INTEND TO DO ABOUT IT?’ ”—Page 145

JACK HEATON OIL PROSPECTOR

BY

Archie
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*Author of "Jack Heaton, Wireless Operator," "Inventing
for Boys," "Handicraft for Boys," "The Boys'
Airplane Book," etc.*

WITH SIX ILLUSTRATIONS BY
CHARLES E. CARTWRIGHT

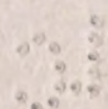


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TO
VIRGIL BYARD COLLINS

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JACK HEATON, OIL PROSPECTOR

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CHAPTER I

HIGH FINANCE

THERE was joy in the home of the Heatons in Montclair, for Jack had recently returned after an absence of six months in The Arctics. But the happiness that marked his home-coming was suddenly changed into gloom for disaster had selected Mr. Heaton for its victim and he had been hit hard.

The old gentleman had just received a report on the status of a certain oil property in Mexico, in which he was interested, and the type-written sheets of the former, as well as numerous beautifully engraved stock certificates printed in a rich green with an impressive gold seal on each one, lay spread out before him on his desk. They represented a small fortune.

For hours Mr. Heaton had poured over the

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reports and his forehead was furrowed with the force of distressing thoughts. If you could have seen him at this time you would have observed that his shoulders, which were so square and business-like when he began the task, finally began to slope and at the end of the ordeal they slumped entirely.

Trying to discover a solution for his weighty problem, he got up and began to pace the floor, forth and back across the library, thence into the parlor and back again. Occasionally he would pause before one of the frosted windows and peer out through it to the street, as though he was waiting for some one, then slowly shake his head and resume his circumscribed walk again.

As he was a man of wide business experience, and one who always had himself well in hand, his actions were quite unlike the imperturbed Mr. Heaton that his family and friends were acquainted with; but he was laboring now under great pressure and the best of men sometimes go to pieces under such untoward circumstances.

Again he returned to his desk and singling out the damaging statements he glared fever-

ishly at them. Then came his first words of despair

“Swindled! . . ruined!!” he cried bitterly; “my savings of a lifetime gone—simply wiped out!”

At this instant there came the crunch of quick, firm footsteps on the chilled gravel walk outside and a moment later Jack Heaton bounded in with all the life and enthusiasm of youth, almost ran into the library, leaped over the table with the agility of an Andes gazelle and tossed his hat on his father’s head with the adroitness of a juggler.

“Hello again, Dad!” he ejaculated cheerily; “busy?”

Mr. Heaton turned slowly in his chair toward his son, with the latter’s hat still setting on his head at a rakish angle, and to say that it gave him an undignified appearance, especially in connection with his rueful countenance, would be putting it altogether too mildly.

“No, Jack, not busy just now, but I will be very soon. I thought when I retired a couple of years ago I was through working but I have just learned that I must take up the lines again where I laid them down—that is if I can.

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Everything is gone—wiped completely out, and I am right back now where I was twenty-five years ago.”

“Why, what has happened, Dad?” questioned Jack, who had not dreamed that a catastrophe was impending.

“Nothing more or less, my boy, than that I have lost the savings of a quarter of a century and that I must now start all over again. It’s hard, bitter hard, to have to face the world at my age penniless and to fight its uncertainties again. It will be hardest of all, though, on Mother, for we will have to give up our home here and live hand to mouth until I get started once more.”

“What has brought about all this and why haven’t I known anything about it before?”

“It came about like this, Jack: As you know, when you were a little chap I got into the oil-engine business and worked my way up until I became the general manager of the New York office of the *Singer Company*. Then you grew up, became a radio operator and started on your various travels in search of adventure and wealth and you have been, I should say, very

successful in your quest of both, considering that you are yet a boy.

I resigned as general manager of the *Singer Crude Oil Engine Company* for two reasons, the first of which was that I felt I had accumulated enough of this world's goods to enable us to live comfortably for the remainder of our lives, and, second and chiefly, because the directors of my company were so ultra-conservative that newer and more progressive firms were slowly but surely making inroads on our business.

"When I withdrew I sold my holdings in the company and, knowing oil, the ever-increasing demand for this great commodity, and the huge profits to be made out of it, I invested our nest-egg in oil stocks. It was at the time when the Texas and Mexican oil fields began to boom."

"I know," broke in Jack; "that was soon after I came back from my whaling trip. I recollect too that there was a lot of *wildcat* oil stock being sold at anywhere from ten cents to ten dollars a share. I hope you didn't get roped in for any of that paper stuff."

"No, my boy, I was not quite as green as that, but almost. While it is true that the

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securities I bought were those of a new organization—the *Mexican Consolidated Oil Company, Limited*, which is located at Terrazas, Chihuahua in Mexico—at the same time I had an oil expert investigate the proposition. He went down there and personally looked over the property. I am satisfied he did it thoroughly and he reported that everything was high-grade and O. K. in every respect. On the strength of the rapidly developing oil conditions and the expert's report I sunk all of my savings—one hundred thousand dollars—in the securities of the *Mexican Consolidated*.

“Almost up to the present time the company has fully come up to my expectations and I have received a large dividend quarterly. When the last dividend was due I learned to my surprise that it would not be paid. I immediately wrote to Mr. Simmonds, a friend of mine at El Paso, who also owns stock in the company, and this report here is the result of his inquiries.

“You can look over these papers later if you care to. In brief, they disclose the following astounding facts: First, that by some hook or crook ten of the seventeen oil producing wells of the company have been turned over to a

Mexican official for a ridiculously low sum and, quite as extraordinary, the other seven wells which up to two months ago had been producing to their usual capacity suddenly showed little or no signs of activity.”

“Have the officers of the *Mexican Consolidated Company* made any statement to explain this strange condition of affairs?” asked Jack.

“The New York representative of the company informs me that there has been a steady decrease in the daily output of the seventeen wells for some time and that the officials were convinced the source of the oil supply was about exhausted. He also told me they claim they sold the ten gushers to a Mexican Government official at a nominal figure—a mere song in fact—because he had grown suspicious. Mr. Perez, the oil company’s representative here, says he has not been able to get word from the oil fields for the past two weeks for the revolutionists are in control of that part of the country.”

“The whole thing looks very fishy to me,” reflected Jack. “If it was known that the oil supply was rapidly being exhausted the company could not have sold them at any price, let

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alone to a Mexican official. And can a company dispose of its property without notifying its stockholders?"

"Anything can be done in Mexico to-day if the men higher up are permitted to participate," Mr. Heaton answered with some bitterness.

"By which you mean that they must get a *rake-off*," said Jack, whose choice of words was not as dignified as that of his father's.

"Exactly. The most crooked looking part of it all is that the company which now purports to be almost insolvent has, through a Wall Street broker, offered to buy my stock in at ten dollars a share. If I accept their offer I will lose ninety thousand dollars cold and that spells ruin for me. On the other hand I can save ten thousand dollars from the wreck if I sell now and that will help me to get a fresh start. Now, Jack, you see just how the matter stands."

Jack sat for a few moments lost in thought. He was naturally high spirited and always optimistic, by which I mean that he had the nerve to look on the bright side of life no matter how black it seemed. For many months he had been

planning a trip to penetrate the jungles of Brazil in search of a hidden valley of diamonds which had been revealed to him by Princess Mabel when he was a captive of the old cannibal overlord, King Oopla.

His father's sudden reversal of fortune meant that he would have to postpone this new high adventure, at least for the time being, and bend all of his energies and concentrate all of his efforts to help him out of the difficulty and to retrieve his fortune if possible.

Jack had already seen enough of Mexican character when he was a wireless operator in the coastwise service to know that many Mexicans are most unscrupulous in their undertakings of love, war and business. That the *Mexican Consolidated Company, Ltd.*, or some one interested in it, was trying to buy back his father's holdings for a measly ten per cent of the amount he had originally paid for them convinced him that there was "dirty work at the crossroads" going on.

"Isn't it the usual way, Dad, for a company which has gone bankrupt to simply shut up shop and make no attempt to pay its stockholders even in small part?"

“That is the way that companies which are organized for the sole purpose of selling stock generally wind up, but legitimate companies that are insolvent are placed in the hands of receivers, who operate them for the mutual benefit of all concerned,” his father explained.

This sudden generosity on the part of the alleged defunct oil company to take up the outstanding stock on a ten per cent. basis aroused Jack’s fighting blood as well as his suspicions. That in its present state the stock was hardly worth the paper it was printed on, in-so-far as his father was concerned, Jack hadn’t the slightest doubt, but he was equally certain that it *was* worth its face value to some one else.

“Don’t sell yet,” he advised his father. “There’s a snake in the grass somewhere and it’s the one best bet that to sell now means a dead sure loss to you of ninety thousand *pesos* in American gold. While you *may* lose all by hanging on to your stock, at the same time it is my belief that by hanging on to it you stand a long chance of winning out. I’ve found out, Dad, that it’s hanging on the last fifteen minutes that usually wins the fight for a fellow.”

“I know, Jack, but if I should hang on and

the stock should prove worthless in the end I'll lose every cent and I can't afford to take the risk on Mother's account."

"But if you sell to these *bunco* men you will only save ten thousand dollars and that's not nearly enough. What we want to do is to save all you have invested in these oil securities—if they are worth anything, and I believe they are.

"I'll tell you what I'll do, Dad. As you say, I've been pretty successful in my undertakings, considering that I've been a rolling stone, and I've something more than ten thousand dollars saved up from my various ventures. If you'll agree to hang on to the stock I'll cover your ten thousand should you lose out, with my own money."

"That is certainly fine of you, Jack," exclaimed Mr. Heaton with a certain suspicious moisture in his eyes, "but I really couldn't accept your hard-earned money, my boy, under any circumstances."

"Hard earned nothing," Jack replied lightly; "why, for every adventure I've had there was not only the fun of it but I've been fairly well paid besides. That last trip to the Arctics I

made on the whaler, though, netted me more than all the others put together and it was what I'd call easy money, too.

"What's more to the point, you're not going to have to accept anything from me because you're not going to lose; no, not as long as I have two good mitts to prevent these crooks from swindling you," declared Jack, emphasizing his meaning by drawing a bead on an imaginary Mexican oil promoter with his index fingers.

"But how do you propose going about it, Jack? It looks to me as if the horse has already been stolen and it's only a question of time until the thieves will get the buggy."

"Well, one thing's certain, and that is as long as there's no one on the ground to look things over you'll always be in the dark. So to-morrow I'm going to 'hop on a rattler,' as Bill calls a train, run down to Chihuahua* and look things over as your special representative. Never mind about the expense, Dad, I'll take care of that, and what's more, I'm going to move heaven and earth to see that you get what you are entitled to. You can bet your bottom

* Pronounced Che-wá-wa.

dollar that no pack of *greasers* can swindle my Dad out of his life's savings and get away with it."

"Mexico is a bad country at best to get into and especially at this time, Jack. You know the natives haven't got any use for the Americans and right now it looks as if we are going to have more trouble with her."

"All I've got to say is that I've been through one war already, and I just missed being served up as a cannibal stew, so I guess I can't fare much worse at the hands of those blood-thirsty *greasers*. Besides, I'm going to take my old buddy, Bill Adams, who was chief gunner on the submarine H-24, with me. Bill's served in the old Regular Army on the border, speaks *Mex* like a native and knows the *greasers* from A to izzard."

"Son, you certainly know how to cheer a fellow up and put confidence into him after he's lost all hope. If you are so determined to see that your poor, old Dad gets a square deal, why, all that I can say is go ahead, and you can rest assured that my support is back of you and my blessing with you."

"I'll have to go to New York right away and

dig up Bill," said Jack, "so, as they say in *Mex*, *Adios*."

With that the youth hurried out to catch a train for the city, where his friend lived with his widowed mother. Bill, be it known, had been with Jack through many of his adventures. Although the gentleman in question could hardly be classed as a *high-brow*, having lived and worked the greater part of his life in the gas-house district in upper Manhattan, he measured up to what he had chosen to style himself, namely, "a dead-game sport, see cull."

As Jack had often said, Bill was "white clear through," and as he was absolutely unafraid he could be depended on under any and all circumstances. Moreover, he was handy with a gun of any kind or size, and all of these qualifications made him a pal worth while.

Reaching 34th Street *via* the Hudson Tubes, Jack took the subway to Broadway and 128th Street. There he *descended* to the street, for this locality lies between two hills and the subway penetrating them is connected by means of a great viaduct.

After a walk of some five blocks east along Manhattan street he came to a two-story build-

ing and on the door a glittering brass plate proclaimed that the gymnasium of *Prof. William Adams, Physical Instructor*, was on the second floor.

Jack mounted the steps two at a time and without any formality walked right into the professor's *gym*. In the center of the large room a platform was built up and this squared ring was four-posted and roped. Engaged therein were two husky looking specimens of the *genus homo*, ducking, side-stepping, upper-cutting and in other devious ways disporting themselves in the gentlemanly art of self-defense.

In one corner was a rich brewer who had evidently consumed over-much of his own output, toiling, sweating and grunting at the wall weights. Two more portly patrons with red noses who looked as though they had been melted and poured into their gym suits, were playfully throwing a medicine ball at one another, emitting the while sounds like those of a porker under a gate, as it slipped through their flabby arms when they would shoot baleful glances at a third party who deigned to notice them occasionally.

The third party was none other than the famous Prof. William Adams, and he was in turn directing his attention to a sallow-faced, bilious-looking youth who feebly tugged at the oars of a rowing machine.

Listen for a moment to what the professor is saying. "Come on, now, cull! Snap out of that dope. You're not learning how to play the pianny now. I'm trying to work some of the cigarettes and cabarets out of that puny little system of yours. Say, I'm a Hindu if a good breath of wind wouldn't blow you so far that it'd take your mother and seven dollars in postage stamps to find you again."

Then catching the baleful glances cast by the medicine-ball experts, he adds, "All right, butter-tubs, time's up and you can quit now; but to-morrow fifteen minutes longer for yours, see!" A second later he was in the ring. "Fierce footwork, Tommy—think you was dancin' with your grandmudder. What's the matter—got lead in your shoes? That guard of yourn, Paddy, would make an old timer think he'd swallowed a feather and tickle hisself to death."

It was at this stage of the game that Bill

Adams, *alias* Professor William Adams, caught sight of Jack.

“Hello, Buddy, how’s tricks,” and then seeing the sober expression on his sometime pal’s face he added, “What’s eatin’ you now?”

Bill lead the way into his private office, which consisted of a corner roughly partitioned off, and Jack lost no time in unloading his troubles on his old *side-kick*.

CHAPTER II

HEADING SOUTH

LIKE most of the human race who are born in poverty and have to battle every inch of the way for the mere right to live, Bill Adams could not tolerate injustices, neither could he bear to stand idly by where there was suffering. Naturally, since this was his disposition, he was all sympathy as he listened to Jack's tale of woe and he was anxious to help right the great wrong that had been done Mr. Heaton.

"You're dead right, Jack," he said emphatically, "it's too big a roll to let a bunch of *greasers* get away with without putting up a fight. Sure I'll go down with you and I'm glad of the chanst."

"But how about these physical wrecks here that you're restoring to youthful health and vigor? What are you going to do with them?" queried Jack.

“Oh, them blokes will get along all right without me. These birds that are in bum health are as funny as a crutch. First they come to me and beg me to make men of them and then as soon as I start in they begin to grouse, and kick and call me a slave-driver. I’m sick of the whole bunch of them. If their brains were made of dynamite they couldn’t blow a thimble over. That’s why I’ll be glad to get away for a while. I need the rest-cure and the sooner we start the better I’ll like it.”

“Then what do you say to leaving to-morrow morning?”

“Suits me fine,” said Bill; “when and where will I meet you?”

“At the Pennsylvania Station at ten-thirty sharp in the morning. The train pulls out at ten-fifty and I’ll have the tickets and our passports O. K.”

“I’ll be there.”

When Jack reached home that evening he found his father in quite a cheerful frame of mind for a man who had been swindled out of a fortune.

“A man called on me shortly after you left, Jack, and he insisted on giving me a certified

check, or the cash if I preferred it, for ten thousand dollars in payment for my thousand shares of stock. He told me that this would positively be my last chance to sell at any price. On your advice I flatly refused," explained Mr. Heaton.

"Bully for you, Dad. Bill and I are leaving to-morrow morning on the *Pennsy* for El Paso and from there on down to the oil fields of Terrazas."

Both his father and mother had grown so accustomed to Jack's long and hazardous trips that they thought little more of his going to Mexico than if his destination had been Philadelphia.

Shortly after dinner, which, as I once mentioned before, is always served in the evening in Montclair, Jack went up to his room and began to carefully overhaul his belongings. From the bottom drawer of his dresser he produced a pair of prospector's boots, serviceable alike for riding or walking, two pairs of riding breeches, four flannel shirts, two silk bandannas, a broad brimmed, low crowned Stetson hat and, last of all, a Colt's .45 caliber revolver and a leather cartridge belt and holster.

— From a closet came a .30 caliber Winchester rifle, a leather scabbard for carrying it on horse-back, and finally an extra large canteen. These articles of clothing and implements of warfare he packed in his big suitcase. To the end that he might get up early he turned in though it was not yet ten o'clock.

For once in his life he was unable to go to sleep the instant he touched the bed. Instead, he lay awake thinking, for he realized that he was about to undertake an adventure far more dangerous than any he had ever made before. And, what was more to the point, his father's fortune was at stake and he was determined to learn the truth about those oil properties whatever the odds might be. Thus it was that the chimes of St. Andrew's Church round the corner struck eleven, twelve and then one o'clock before Jack got to sleep.

The lone policeman making his rounds in the cold wintry night passed the house but he did not see the skulking figure that crept from shadow to shadow until it was directly under the library window. There it stopped, then drew from its coat a long bar of steel, sharp-

ened at one end like a cold chisel, and with this *jimmy* it pried up the window.

This done, the marauder was inside the house the next instant. He threw a small spot-light from an electric flash-lamp on the floor of the darkened library, then caused it to travel up the wall and finally, when he brought it to rest, it covered the door of a wall-safe. The burglar gave a grunt of satisfaction and set the lamp on the table so that the circle of light fell full upon the dial of the combination lock.

His next move was to draw from the pocket of his roomy coat a breast drill with which he quickly drilled a hole in the steel door near the lock. This done, he poured a little high explosive into the hole, put a fuse with a blasting cap on one end into it and lit the free end.

The safe-blower then stepped into the parlor to await the result of his work, but he had not long to wait, for almost immediately there came a muffled thud which jarred the house like a young earthquake. He returned to the safe, threw his flash light on it and found that the door had been blown open and the contents exposed to plain sight. The burglar rummaged

through the papers and scanned them with hot haste.

When the explosion occurred Jack sat bolt upright in bed. His first thought was that the dynamite plant at Tom's River had blown up but his intuitive caution led him to see if all was well in the house. Putting on his bath robe as he went, he noiselessly descended the stairs and crept into the parlor.

There in front of the safe he could see the dim form of a man going through his father's papers. Jack regretted that he had come down unarmed but he knew that the least delay would give the burglar a chance to escape.

Two quick steps and a little jump landed Jack on the safe-blower's back. The latter uttered a guttural cry of rage and then let go a string of Spanish cuss-words. Small as he was he fought like a wildcat and with a desperate effort he finally got one hand free and Jack caught the gleaming flash of a knife in the air.

He was too quick for the would-be killer and sprang back just in time to miss a vicious thrust which, had it reached him, would certainly have ended his career. Like a flash Jack took a step forward, gauged the distance between his op-

ponent's head and his own foot and with the same calculating coolness which the star punter of a football team exhibits when in a tight place, he gave him a terrific kick full on the point of his chin. The knife flew from his nerveless grip and the burglar crumpled up on the floor.

By this time Mr. Heaton had been awakened by the noise of the scuffle and he now appeared holding a flash-light in one hand and his revolver in the other.

"What's the matter, Jack," he asked anxiously.

"Nothing the matter now, Dad, but there came mighty nearly being something the matter. This rascally *greaser* was going through your safe when I surprised him. Like the cut-throat that he is, he drew a knife on me and as I was unarmed I was forced to use a trick taught me by a French sailor. As you can see, it was a good one, for he's still dead to the world. Keep your eye on him and keep him covered with your gun while I go to the garage and get a rope."

Jack reappeared in a few minutes with some twenty feet of hemp-rope, a little larger than a clothes-line. Before trussing up the fellow

he went through his pockets. From an inside one he drew forth a bulky envelope and tossing it to his father he said: "That's yours, Dad."

"By gravy," exclaimed Mr. Heaton in astonishment, "those are my *Mexican Consolidated* stock certificates. What in thunder do you suppose the fellow could have wanted with them?"

"Maybe he thought it was paper money," suggested Jack.

"Not much chance of that, Jack. Even a blind man could tell these certificates from greenbacks. Say, son, I wonder if this attempt to rob me could have any bearing on my refusal to sell these securities to-day. You know I told the representative who called on me that I was going to hang on to this stock until my dying day, let come what may."

"That's just about the size of it, Dad," agreed Jack; "they want your stock bad and not being able to get it on a ten per cent basis they sent this crook up here to get it for nothing. Well, my idea of it is that we'll turn him over to the police and he'll get about ten years at hard labor."

In the meantime Jack had tied the legs and arms of the housebreaker, safe-blower, and, I

dare say, it would be perfectly all right to call him a horse-thief to boot, securely together. This operation had the effect of restoring him to consciousness. He jabbered in his native tongue, made grimaces with his face and struggled violently to get loose, but it was no go and he lay there on the floor a helpless captive.

“Pretty sight, isn’t he,” Jack laughed. “I wonder how he came by that ugly looking scar across his forehead. Wonder if the bad *hombre* who gave it to him was also responsible for relieving him of the upper half of his right ear.”

So that there might be no commotion in the neighborhood—for Montclairites particularly dislike anything that in the least savors of notoriety—Mr. Heaton asked Jack to go out and get the policeman on the beat rather than to call up the police station on the ’phone when half, or a dozen, reserves would be sent up to get the fellow.

Jack lost no time in dressing and getting out. He was not gone long until he returned with one of Montclair’s “finest,” who took the prisoner in charge and snapped a pair of handcuffs on his wrists.

“Well, Jack, if you are going to El Paso in the morning you had better get back to bed post-haste,” admonished Mr. Heaton as the officer was leading the culprit away. Upon hearing the words El Paso the safe-blower gave a sneer of satisfaction but neither Mr. Heaton nor Jack noticed it.

“I’ll do that little thing right away, Dad. You’d better let me take those certificates over to the safe deposit company to-morrow morning and put them in a box, where they’ll be perfectly safe. And now ‘good-night’ again, or shall I say ‘good-morning.’ ”

Outside the Heaton home the policeman was having his own troubles. The Mexican, for such the erstwhile prisoner’s swarthy countenance proclaimed him to be, proved to be a veritable handcuff king. You can imagine Mr. Heaton’s surprise and vexation when he telephoned the next morning to the police station and the desk-sergeant informed him that the prisoner had slipped his handcuffs and made good his escape. How he had managed it the policeman in whose custody he was could not say, but the Chief-of-Police of Montclair later explained to Mr. Heaton “that among profes-

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sional crooks there are forty known ways to do the trick."

After a couple of hour's sleep Jack got up without feeling any too much refreshed, but a good breakfast brought back his usual *pep*. Then came the time of parting and he said *au revoir* to his father and mother, which in French means "good-by until we meet again," and he was off on his important mission.

On reaching New York Jack took the stock certificates which had so nearly been stolen the night before and deposited them in a box in the safe deposit company's vault in the Equitable Building. As he passed out through the great safe door of the vault he breathed a sigh of relief.

"There," he thought, "I'll bet a dollar to a doughnut no Mexican second-story man can break in there and get them."

On arriving at the Pennsylvania Station at ten-thirty, or thereabouts, he found Bill on hand waiting for him. They were an oddly diversified pair, were Jack and his pal Bill. To the casual observer the former might easily have been taken for some rich New Yorker's

son traveling for pleasure, while Bill was, in the vernacular, "a hard looking guy."

With some mental reservations, though, he could have passed as Jack's valet or, more aptly, a slugger sent along to look after the physical welfare of the young man he accompanied. But you and I know differently and I think you will agree with me that Jack was pretty well able to take care of himself under any and all circumstances.

A few minutes later they were aboard the *Pennsylvania Limited* and comfortably settled in their Pullman. The heavy all steel train pulled out at precisely ten-fifty and after passing through the tunnel under the Hudson River they were soon headed south at the rate of sixty miles an hour.

As they stood on the observation platform Jack told Bill of the events of the previous night. As to the episode of the knife Bill said that his only wonder was that he (Jack) hadn't found another one in his boot-leg or in a shoulder-sheath.

"Most *greasers*," he continued, "carry a couple and sometimes three knives and they are certainly wizards when it comes to usin'

them. Why, I've seen one *greaser* pin another to a hitchin'-post and him fifty-feet away at that. Now let's have your plans, Jack."

"I haven't got any more plans than a rabbit, Bill. The way I've got it doped out is that we'll go to El Paso; there we'll buy a couple of good horses and an outfit and cross over into Chihuahua. We'll claim that we're prospectors and I guess we can bluff our way through on that basis. Just what we'll do after that I haven't the faintest idea. I've got a hunch, though, that as soon as we're on the actual ground, that is to say, in the oil fields owned by the *Mexican Consolidated*, we'll be able to ferret out just what kind of fifty-seven varieties of crooked business is going on. Let's go on ahead to the dining car and *chow*, as we used to say in the army; what do you say?"

"Lead me to it, friend. As the hobo says when he asks for a handout, 'lady, will you kindly give me a drink of water, I'm so hungry I don't know where I'm going to sleep to-night.'"

After a hearty meal the two war-time pals retraced their steps through the parlor and sleeping cars back toward the observation car.

As they were passing through one of the cars Bill's sporting eye caught a friendly game of cards in progress in one of the smoking compartments and he and Jack stopped to watch the play.

They stepped inside where they could see and follow the hands as they were dealt by the four fat, genial and prosperous-looking traveling men. The game interested Jack for a while but he presently grew tired of it and absently glanced into a mirror fitted in a door in the compartment. Seated back of him was a swarthy short man, neatly dressed but who, Jack observed, was watching him like a hawk.

Jack took to watching the stranger, for there was something familiar about the fellow's face. From his point of vantage he could catch only the man's profile and he wanted to see his full face. Fortune was with him, for just then a man came in, the train lurched to one side and the newcomer's elbow grabbed the top of the swarthy man's head, knocking his hat to one side.

Jack could not restrain a mild cry of surprise, for the unexpected mishap disclosed a livid scar running across the fellow's forehead

as well as that half of his right ear had been shorn away. It was no other person than the safe-blower of the night before, whom Jack had believed was safely incarcerated in the Montclair limbo.

At Jack's outcry the Mexican realized that he had been recognized and darted from the compartment before either Jack or Bill could stop him and without waiting to recover his hat. Jack tore after him and managed to keep him in sight through a couple of cars but in the third one he met defeat. A dusky-hued porter was coming up the aisle with a step-ladder in his hand. The Mexican dodged him but when it was Jack's turn the clumsy negro swung around the other way, the ladder caught Jack neatly on the shins, and tripped him up much to his own wrath and the delight of the passengers.

By the time he had cleared himself of the ladder and the porter and listened to the latter's scared apology, "no 'fense, boss, no 'fense, boss," the rascal had disappeared as completely as if he had never been on the train. Together Jack and Bill went to the Pullman

conductor and demanded that a search be made of the train and the man arrested.

“Sorry, fellows, but it can’t be done,” replied that worthy official, “the only thing I can do is to wire on a description of the missing gent to the Harrisburg police when we reach the next stop and have them nab him when we get there.”

“Say, Bill, that thug heard Dad say I was leaving for El Paso to-day. Now what the dickens do you suppose he’s doing on this train? He either thinks I’ve got the certificates or else he wants to get me! It looks to me as if we are going to have trouble before we get across the Rio Grande.”

“You know I was always peace-lovin’, Jack,” vouchsafed Bill in his quiet, docile way. “It gen’ally takes two to make sure enough trouble and you’ll always find that I’m an accessory before the fact, as a Harlem lawyer would say, so count me in on the fun if there’s going to be any. See!”

CHAPTER III

BAD HOMBRE FROM CHILILI

ALTHOUGH three plain-clothes men of the Harrisburg police force searched the train thoroughly at the latter stop while the engines were being changed, and others were on the look-out around it, no trace was found of the man with the scar on his forehead and whose ear had been lopped off. The boys concluded that when he saw Jack he had hidden somewhere on the train and dropped off the first time it slowed down.

Not to be caught napping though, Jack and Bill kept a sharp lookout for him all the rest of the trip. At noon the next day the *Limited* crossed the great Eads bridge over the Mississippi River at St. Louis and after running under the city through a tunnel it pulled into the *Union Station*—something of a wonder in itself, since more railroads meet there than at any other station in the world.

There the train of Pullmans was broken up, the cars switched around and new trains made up, one going north to St. Paul, another south to New Orleans, still another to San Francisco, and their own to El Paso and other Texan points.

The rest of their trip through Missouri and Oklahoma, which latter state was formerly Indian Territory, and Texas was without further incident or excitement. The change of climate, however, was distinctly agreeable, for the blasts of winter had gradually been tempered by that vast and important warm ocean-current which comes out of the Gulf of Mexico, where it raises the temperature of the southern states until the weather is as salubrious in January as that of a June day in the north—only more so.

The ride across western Texas back of oil-burning locomotives was long, hot and dusty and in consequence it seemed well-nigh interminable. Towns were mighty few and far between and when the Rio Pecos, which has its source somewhere up in Colorado, flows down through New Mexico and empties into the Rio Grande, was reached it was a pleasant sight

to see by way of contrast with the semi-desert country which they were crossing.

Early in the evening of the following day the train pulled into El Paso, a town of fair size, as southwestern towns go, in the extreme western peak of the *Lone Star State*, as Texas is called. Here, too, Texas and Old Mexico come together, but never the twain shall meet except that it be to exchange a few bullets.

Jack and Bill were right glad to end this leg of their journey and get out and breathe the pure air which has not yet been contaminated by subways and sky-scrapers. In a word, El Paso looked good to them.

It is a town of about twelve thousand people and this population is made up of white folks, Mexicans, Indians, half-breeds, Chinamen, cowboys, gamblers and all the accouterments of a wide-open frontier town. It is connected with Juarez,* or *El Paso del Norte*, as it was formerly called, which means in Spanish "the pass to the north," by means of a bridge. It was so named by Juan de Oñate, a Spanish explorer, way back in 1598. In due course of human events, that is to say, nearly three hundred

* Pronounced War'-es.

years later, it came to be the headquarters for cattle raisers and silver miners from the south and a refuge for consumptives from the north.

The boys put up at *El Hotel Estrella Solo*, which done into plain American is *The Lone Star Hotel*, that night. In the morning they paid their respects to the Mexican Consul, explained to him that they were going into Mexico to prospect for oil, were capable of taking care of themselves and meant no harm to any one. Señor Alarcón viséed their passports, which they had failed to have done in New York, and he explained to them that as long as they attended to their own business and did not run into any bandits or bands of guerrillas they were perfectly safe.

The Consul further pointed out that Mexico was divided against herself by many factions; that the present government under President Carranza was making every effort to suppress the bandits and revolutionists, and to protect American citizens, but that under existing conditions it was a very difficult thing to do. All in all, the Consul was so suave, smooth and oily that Bill took an instant dislike to him.

"Nice chap, that Señor Alarcón," remarked Jack, when they got outside.

"That's the trouble, he's too nice," insisted Bill querulously. "Sure they're doing all they can to protect Americans. Look at all the murders, hold-ups, and kidnapin' that's been goin' on in the last year. Right now Jenkins, our American Consul, who was kidnaped by bandits and ransomed, has been arrested by the Carranza government and thrown in jail on the charge that he was in on the *divvy* with the bandits.

"The whole trouble with these *greasers* is that they think they are fooling Uncle Sam. But take it from me, Buddy, they are going to wake up some morning and find they have another *think* coming and when they do you and me will be right in the vanguard."

"You said it," Jack made reply. "Well let's go over to Juarez and oufit there. We ought to pick up a couple of fair to middling riding horses there cheap."

The boys went back to their hotel, got their suit-cases and jumped into a jitney. As they were going over the International Bridge, which connects the two towns, they were im-

peded in their progress by a large herd of cattle that half a dozen *vaqueros*, or Mexican cowboys, were driving over. With their splendid half-wild cow-ponies, showy saddles studded with silver nails, their huge *sombreros* and gorgeously colored *zarapes*, they were indeed a sight to behold.

Like all of the Latin races, the Mexicans have an inordinate love for finery. Velvet jackets and trousers and riding boots embroidered with silver and gold threads are the rule down there rather than the exception. Then came the opposite extreme in the shape of some *peons*, who are the poor laboring people of Mexico; they were almost devoid of clothes and each one was driving a burro or two which carried a bundle of faggots on either side of its back. It looked as if time had slipped a cog and turned back to the period when Texas was a part of Mexico.

Once across the bridge the suit-cases of the boys were examined by the Mexican customs officials and with much talking and very little looking they pasted a stamp on each one to show that no contraband goods were contained therein and passed them on. If they had dis-

covered the arsenal under Jack and Bill's clothes things might have been different.

They put up at a little *adobe* inn that looked as if it might be something more but certainly nothing less than a thousand years old. It was directly across from the old bull-ring where in the palmy days of Mexico, that is to say, when the country was ruled by the iron hand of Diaz, bull-fights were the national sport.

Juarez was first established as a military post to check the inroads of savage tribes of Indians which ravaged the whole north of the country even as the more savage bandits do now. The muddy Rio Grande, which in time past frequently overflowed its banks, has made the valley very fertile and fields of alfalfa and maize grow amazingly well, while the surrounding country is dotted with splendid gardens and orchards that produce the most delicious fruits.

Jack and Bill made a survey of the town in quest of a suitable outfit. They learned that an auction sale of horses was going to take place that very morning in the *plaza*, as the public square is called. Accordingly they turned their steps in that direction and a short walk brought them to the horse-mart.

On one side there were crowded into an improvised *corral* some twenty or more horses and the auctioneer, who was either a private stock-raiser or else a *rustler*, would rope one of them, lead it from the corral and then the bidding would begin. It was very spirited, for the Mexicans dearly love anything in which the element of chance is present. All through the republic you will hear everybody from the highest official down to the lowest peon tell what he is going to do when he wins the capital prize in the National lottery. The prospective buyers of a horse would look at its teeth, and, if it was not too wild and vicious, at its hoofs and size it up in general.

After a couple of sales had been made the auctioneer led forth from the corral a beautiful *pinto*, that is, a horse which is sometimes white with a big spot, often black, on its side, like a fox terrier. Pretty as he was it was quite clear from his antics that a saddle had never touched his back. As most of the buyers were looking for saddle broken animals there were few bids and as Bill was not so particular he had small trouble in buying him for a ridiculously low sum.

After a few more horses had been put up and sold the auctioneer brought forth a blue roan which, although a little scraggy, was, judging from its deep withers, which showed that it had big lungs and hence good wind, a speedy animal and full of endurance. This roan suited Jack's fancy to a T and he bought it.

As there were still some eight or ten more animals to be sold the boys left their mounts in the *corral* and set out for a saddler's shop a few blocks away, to which the auctioneer had directed them.

"I hopes as how he doesn't sell our horses over again as soon as we're out of ear-shot," thought Bill out loud.

"That would be a calamity," said Jack; well, we'll have to take a chance and believe he's more honest than a Florida land shark."

Bill bought a regulation McClellan army saddle, a blanket, a curb-bit and bridle, a pair of silver mounted spurs with big rowels *à la* Mexican style. Jack, who never cared much for an army saddle, bought instead a stock saddle with a high pommel and cantle. Carrying their outfits under their arms they went back to the corral. By this time the auctioneer had sold

the remaining horses and the *corral* was empty. Seeing that Bill was about to ride the outlaw horse, the few hangers-on lingered longer, hoping that the Americano would be thrown and trampled on.

They eagerly watched Bill tie the pinto as short as he could over to the *corral* fence with the halter rope. Then he got a feed sack and Jack held it over the outlaw's eyes. Bill lost no time in folding a blanket and gingerly placed it on the pinto's back; over his left arm he carried his saddle, which he just as gently set on the blanket. Even with all this kindness the outlaw no sooner felt the weight of the saddle than he promptly bucked it off, much to the delight of the wild and wooly spectators who howled and hooted with derisive joy.

What with the horse and the Mexican's bullyragging him, Bill was getting hot under the collar and a deep flush had crept up his neck and colored his face until he looked like a boiled beet. Jack could see by the way his chin stuck out that he was determined to ride the horse if only to fool the *greasers* who wished him bad luck.

It took several attempts and much patience

to get the saddle on the animal's back, cinch it up and bridle him. In the meantime the pinto had worked himself up into a fine frenzy by virtue of this unaccustomed treatment and the hurt which had been done to his pride by tying this strange contraption to his back.

Some people have the idea that horses don't think, but if you've ever tried to ride an outlaw you'd know they do. Exactly what they think is hard to say because, since they have horse-sense, they naturally think horse thoughts.

Having finally succeeded in saddling and bridling him, Jack untied him and led him to the center of the *corral*. Bill donned his spurs and followed. After a spell of spasmodic bucking, which failed to dislodge the saddle, the *pinto* quieted down as if to wait to see what new indignity was to be heaped upon him.

Approaching him from the *near* side, as the left side is called, Bill very gently put his left foot into the stirrup; then he grasped the reins up close to the bit and pulled the horse's head around until he could lock his fingers in his mane. Jack still hung on to the halter rope and Bill easily swung his right leg over the

saddle and gently lowered himself into the seat.

"All right, Jack, let 'er buck!" Bill yelled, and his pal let the halter rope go, leaving the *pinto* free to buck his rider off if he could.

For a second both rider and horse remained as still as if they had been chiseled from a block of marble, but it was only for a second. Then the little "hawse" snorted, pawed the ground with a wild look of vengeance in his eye and reared up on his hind legs; like a whirling Dervish he turned round and round, but this was because Bill had taken the precaution to get a close-up grip on the reins. From the crowd came a cry, "The Americano is afraid to give the horse his head!"

This taunt was too much for Bill and he gradually lengthened his hold on the reins. The *pinto* slowly straightened his head up and then, finding himself free for the first time, he quickly took advantage of the liberty given him, lowered his head between his forelegs and went off like fireworks, bucking and rearing for all he was worth.

As Jack watched his pal stick to that horse he never would have believed that this Harlem boy of the gas-house district was not a born

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frontiersman had he not known his history. But then, William S. Hart was born in Newburgh, N. Y., so you never can tell.

Bill, who was just as much at home on a bucking broncho as he was on a submarine chaser or a U-boat, had locked the rowels of his spurs into the cinch strap—an old cowboy trick—and as a result he was, to all intents and purposes, glued to the saddle, as Jack afterward said in telling me the story.

“I’ll say that those *greasers* never saw riding before that could come up to it,” he added; “why you couldn’t have slipped a cigarette paper between Bill and the saddle, he hugged it so tight.”

Finding that he could not buck his tenacious rider off, the *pinto* tried another stunt that he calculated would put his owner to the bad and that was to scrape his legs off against the sides of the *corral*. Bill, though, was wise to all the tricks of a bucking broncho, so every time the “hawse” tried to brush up against the fence he would dig his spurs into him unmercifully on that side.

Balked in this star attempt to do his rider to death he tried a new tactic and that was to

lay down and roll over on him. The pinto did this so suddenly that he thought he had succeeded, but Bill had nimbly slipped out of the saddle. His horse's joy was short lived, for as he jumped to his feet he again felt the weight of the rider, the detestable pressure of his knees and the cruel prick of the spurs in his flanks.

A few more half-hearted bucks and Mr. Pinto gave up trying to break his rider's mastery and he stood trembling like a leaf. Prof. William Adams, of the *genus homo-sapiens*, which means nimble-witted man, patted his *pinto* on the neck and was declared the conqueror. Bill trotted him around the *corral* a couple of times, dismounted and held out a lump of sugar. The horse whinnied, sniffed of it and then accepted and ate the gift. From that time on horse and master were the best of friends.

Quite early in the performance the Mexicans who were looking on had come to the conclusion that the hated *Americano* was not going to be thrown and trampled on by the broncho and so, when they saw that the horse was broken, they gradually slunk away, and Bill and Jack were left alone.

Having broken the *pinto*, Jack saddled his

own horse and they spent the rest of the afternoon riding around getting an outfit. Among the things they bought that were indispensable accessories to every prospector's equipment was a pack-mule and a pack-saddle. They also invested in a tarpaulin for use as a shelter, some rock drills, a cooking outfit, grub and, last but by no means least, Jack insisted on buying several sticks of dynamite and a blasting machine. The latter is really a little dynamo which generates an electric current when you push down on the handle.

Finally, to complete the outfit he got a box of electric blasting caps and some flexible connecting wire. A blasting cap is made of a copper shell with two leading-in wires cemented in it and these are connected with a very fine wire. The cap is then filled with a charge of powder and the ends sealed up.

To explode a stick of dynamite the cap is set in the end of it and the leading-in wires are connected with the blasting machine. Now, when you push down on the handle of the machine, the latter generates a current; this heats the fine wire bridge in the cap and fires the gun-

powder which in turn explodes the dynamite by *percussion*, that is to say, by shock.

To Bill's questions regarding this seemingly useless piece of paraphernalia Jack replied that while it would in all probability prove to be of no value, he was buying it on a *hunch*. Just how good his *hunch* was we shall presently see. That evening Bill taught Jack how to pack the outfit on the mule properly and to throw a *double diamond hitch*, which, as every prospector knows, takes two men to do the job right.

Then they returned to their inn, a quaint little place and an excellent example of Spanish-Indian architecture of the southwest. Built of sun-baked blocks of mud, or '*dobe*', it stood two stories high and looked as if it might have been there when Juan de Oñate discovered the place. The front, which was open, served as a *café* and dining-room, while in the center of the building there was the courtyard, or *patio*, so dear to the heart of the Mexican.

Around and off from the courtyard the sleeping rooms of the proprietor opened, while on the second floor were the guest rooms—at least that is where most of those who slept there did their guessing. The floors were of tile, which

at any rate are sanitary, the walls were white-washed and the only articles of furniture were the beds, a couple of chairs and a table, all of which was probably premeditated, as the fewer things in the room the less use the bugs have for it.

After a hearty dinner of *chili con carne y frijoles*, *café con leché y pan*, which simply means chili with meat and beans, coffee with milk, and bread, the boys went to their room and to bed, for they wanted to make an early start the next morning.

As dawn was breaking Jack and Bill donned their riding breeches, boots, six-guns and sombreros. The transformation was as wonderful as it was complete. On the previous day Jack had looked like a prosperous and aggressive young business man, while Bill looked like a blacksmith's apprentice all dressed up in store clothes. Now both of them assumed the aspect of born and bred prospectors.

They had a ride of some two hundred miles before them and they were right glad to get started for they were champing at their bits in their eagerness to get into action. Bill, who needed the rest-cure, was getting it, for his

pinto had to be rebroken every time he mounted him, although his displays now were those of temperament rather than of temper.

The boys headed south toward the *Sierra Madre* range of mountains and they soon lost sight of Juarez and its little 'dobe buildings. Jack took the lead and Bill brought up in the rear leading the pack-mule. Handicapped with the latter beast of burden the best they could do was to keep to a brisk trot, although it was clear that both horses would have preferred the gallop.

At noon they stopped along the trail and threw together a little bite to eat. Then they picketed their horses and rested for a couple of hours in the scant shade of a giant cactus from the heat of the scorching midday sun. Greatly refreshed by their *siesta*, they continued their way along a fairly well beaten trail. After they had jogged along for some ten miles Jack sighted a tiny cloud of dust far away above the *mesquite* bushes, and as it kept growing larger and clearer he proclaimed it to be a lone horseman coming toward them on the dead gallop.

A few minutes later the man on horseback

was plainly visible. Neither Jack nor Bill could see the need for such great haste, but they quickly found out, for, as he came up at break-neck speed, he wheeled his horse up in front of them, drew a revolver and leveling it at Jack's head, cried, "*manos altos!* (hands up) *pronto!*" (quickly).

Realizing that the bandit had the drop on them they complied without any loss of time to his wishes. He then told them to dismount.

"Say cull, who are you anyway?" asked Bill without caring a whole lot.

"Never you min' who me be," the *greaser* retorted in bad English. "Sometimes I be call *Bad Hombre from Chilili*. Joost now I be ready to rob the Americano. Better it is you get off the horse pronto. Maybe I keel you. *Quien sabe!*" With that he grinned diabolically, showing his dirty yellow teeth.

Bill slipped reluctantly to the ground, but Jack was doing a stroke of quick thinking. As he had always said, his brain worked better when he was in danger than at any other time.

As he swung out of the saddle he drew his revolver with lightning-like rapidity. Followed two reports almost simultaneously and Jack's

sombrero jumped from his head. The *greaser* slid slowly out of his saddle, fell to the ground with a guttural cry and lay there as still as a dead 'possum.

"For the love of Mike," exclaimed Bill with downright admiration, "I never knew you was a gun-man before Jack. You sure caught that bird neat. Are you hurt?"

"He never touched me, but he's ruined my new nine-dollar *Stetson*," Jack complained, retrieving the bullet-pierced headgear from the dust and poking his finger into a jagged hole in the crown.

"Well, from now on, all I've got to say is that you're the *Bad Hombre from Chilili* in the original package," quoth Bill.

CHAPTER IV

“ELEVATE AND DONATE!”

THE boys picked up the hold-up man's revolver and relieved him of the other one and his knife. Having corralled his arsenal, Bill examined him for his hurt and found that Jack had only slightly wounded him, the bullet merely going through the fleshy part of his shoulder.

“I'm mighty glad I didn't puncture him any worse,” said Jack, “because if I had there's no telling what the outcome would be.”

“One less murderous *greaser* in the world wouldn't matter,” admitted Bill.

The *Bad Hombre of Chilili* had come to and Bill plugged his handkerchief into the bleeding wound and tied his arm up in a sling, which, according to the code prevailing in those parts, was first-rate first-aid to the injured. The bandit sat quite still while he was propped up against a mesquite bush, but neither the pain

of his wound nor Bill's Red Cross attentions were severe enough to prevent him from fluently cussing Jack like a Spanish trooper.

The young prospector was disposed to pay no attention to him for a while, but finally he got tired of the abuse and gently remonstrated with the bad man.

“That will be about all for this time,” Jack growled at him; “close your face or I'll bore a hole in your other shoulder so that you'll have something to cuss about. Why, you ought to be glad you're alive and kicking.”

The bandit sullenly subsided and with the help of the hated Americanos he raised himself slowly to his feet and with no small effort managed to mount his horse.

“*Por Dios!* the Americano pigs will never live to reach the oil fields,” he shouted in rage, and with that he put spurs to his horse and was away at a dead gallop for Juarez.

“How in thunder did that bird know we are headed for the oil fields?” asked Bill, greatly perplexed.

“According to my way of figuring that's about as easy as adding two and two on an adding machine,” returned Jack. “I'll bet

that safe-blowing *greaser* on the train never got off at all and that right now he's in Juarez."

"This *Bad Hombre*, as he calls hisself, isn't the same bird that blew your Dad's safe, is he? I didn't notice whether he had a scar on his forehead or was minus an ear."

"No, he's a different fellow entirely, but you can take it from me he's of the same stripe. It's ten to one, though, the Mexican I saw on the train is in cahoots with or has hired this *Bad Hombre* to settle our hash and keep us from reaching our destination. I tell you, Bill, there's something as crooked as a bent corkscrew in this oil proposition. I'm glad I winged that fellow now, for maybe it will teach him that we're not to be fooled with."

"You're dead right," agreed his pal; "these *greasers* are the biggest cowards on this old mud ball of ours. They all depend on ambush, surprise and other underhand tricks to carry them through. From now on we're going to have a royal time of it, and you can lay to that," he chuckled.

"This was the time old *Chilili* ambushed himself," laughed Jack. "We may have a royal

time as you say, Bill, but we're going to have our hands full, that I can plainly see. We've got to be on the *qui vive*——”

“Whatever that may be,” broke in Bill. “From now on every second of the time day and night or we'll get hamstrung or something worse,” Jack went on, paying no attention to Bill's interruption.

As dusk was coming on the boys strung up their tarpaulin, picketed their horses and set about getting their evening meal. They were very hungry and went to it with great gusto. Having satisfied the inner man, they lay back at their ease with right good will and talked over the queer turn that events had taken and framed up their plans for the morrow.

The temperature of the evening proved to be the opposite of that during the day, for when the sun went down the scorching heat on the alkali earth subsided and as night wore on it grew quite cool. There is very little twilight in semi-tropical countries and, hence, the gradations of light are not as pronounced as they are in northern climes; the result is that almost as soon as the sun sets it begins to get dark. The boys built a cheery little fire of dead

mesquite bushes and its warmth proved very acceptable to them in the desert night.

Sitting 'round the cheery camp fire called to Bill's mind many another evening when he had had the same experience down on the border, and he was moved by its gleaming flames and glowing embers to tell a story.

"The way these *greasers* work things puts me in mind of a bit of trouble me and my buddy, Longhorn Whittaker, had down here on the border," he began, looking straight into the fire. "That was something like six years ago and me and Longhorn, as he calls hisself, as a couple of kids was ambitious and aspirin' to become a pair o' cattle-kings and was runnin' our cattle on a free range over in Sonora, about six hundred miles east of here.

"We had a small ranch shack which cost us a lot o' money, maybe as much as two hundred dollars, and more hard work than I cares to recollect. Best of all, though, we had the only dependable waterin' hole in the country, all the others bein' uncertain even in the wet season and sure to disappear in the dry season. Adjoinin' our rancho was the rancho of one Señor Fernando Gomez, cattle baron of Señora, and

as mean a lookin', dried-up, devil-may-care a *greaser* as you ever saw. The first time I sees him I takes a violent dislike to his *physog*, which resembles the map of Mexico, and Longhorn agrees on both points.

“Comes the dry season and it's hotter'n hades, and our waterin' hole is the only oasis within a range as far as men can ride in saddles. Also comes this palaverin' little *greaser*, Gomez. ‘Señors,’ he whines as if he's all in, ‘my cattle they are die with great thirst. Unless you are great, good Americanos and let them drink at your spring I am ruin’.”

“‘How about it?’ I asks Longhorn.

“‘Shore,’ says he with his big heart; ‘I guess there's water enough for both of us. Tell him to go ahead.’

“Señor Gomez calls us his saviors and the old sugar-eatin' coyote goes away with tears in his eyes. From that time on he waters his cattle at our spring, but we never gets even a pleasant look, much less a thank-you.

“Then one fine mornin' we drives our cattle down to water and finds our water-hole neatly fenced in and a sign on it which asserts that ‘this bein' a free range and Señor Gomez havin’

watered his cattle at the spring for some time previous, and him havin' legally filed on said spring, the government assigns to said party the sole right, title and interest in and ownership to the aforesaid spring for a period of five years,' or words which mean the same.

"Longhorn has to read the sign several times before the low-down trick sinks into his bean, and then he gets rid of a choice lot of words that the *New York Times* would refuse to take as news.

"Next thing I knows and he rips the notice offen the fence and a *vaquero* sitting on the opposite side with a *Winchester* acrost his knees punctures his sombrero for him an' says he'll do the same for his waistcoat if he offers further injury to Señor Gomez's property. Longhorn is a sure enough hard-boiled egg for a young feller, but he doesn't say a word and walks away with a smile which doesn't mean that he's pleased. So you see that these *greasers* ain't to be trusted except when you've pointed the toes of their boots skyward."

"You never spoke a truer word, Bill. But what happened to you and your pal, Longhorn?" asked Jack.

“Oh, yes, I forgot to mention,” added Bill with some show of sorrow in his voice, “that evening’ as I rides up to the rancho I sees somethin’ hangin’ in the doorway of our shack and on closer investigation I discovers that it resembles a human bein’. On turnin’ it around I sees as how it had been hangin’ there for quite some time and nat’rally he’s of no more account on this earth. Pinned to his shirt is a note which reads:

“ ‘Deer Bill and Pardner. Failin’ to see any loophole outen this orful mess i takes the easiest way and has a little necktye party all by my lonesome at the expense of our deer friend here, Señor Gomez. Consekintly I’m leavin’ *pronto* for parts unknown. The cattle is all yourn. So good-by. Longhorn.’

“On readin’ this I was about as comfortable as the backbone of a disheartened mule, but as I said before, Longhorn was a hard-boiled egg.

“Well,” finished Bill, “I guess I’ll turn in.”

“But how did *you* get out?” Jack asked him.

“Who, me? Oh, I got out of Soñora with the Mexican *rurales* just one jump behind me.”

With that Bill rolled himself up in his blanket and Jack stood the first watch.

They had agreed that in this fair land, where nature had been so lavish with her gifts of silver and gems and oil and whose inhabitants were so terribly hostile toward the people of the friendly nation to the north, it would not do for both of them to sleep at the same time. So four hours on and four hours off duty was the self-imposed rule they were to live by during their nights in Mexico.

Although Jack had rather expected the *Bad Hombre* to report his defeat in Juarez and to head an armed force to pursue them, things were as quiet as Wall Street on a Sunday morning. In four hours to the minute he woke Bill up and then went to sleep himself. Bill's four-hour trick went more quickly, for he busied himself the last hour by getting breakfast. When all was ready he called Jack, likewise to the minute, and they had their bacon and bread and coffee. It tasted immense and they did full justice to it. The meal over, they broke camp and jogged along their way southward again.

Along about noon the trail closed in and ran alongside of the *Mexico and Northwestern*

Railway tracks. They followed it for some distance, when there appeared on the horizon a town which, it was evident, was on the railroad.

Jack was not at all superstitious, but he often got what is popularly called a *hunch*, that is, a presentiment, and all morning he felt in his bones that they were going to run into trouble before the day was over unless they devised a way to escape it. And they do say down in Mexico that “he who thinks of trouble will surely get into it.”

After what the *Bad Hombre of Chilili* had said about their “never reaching the oil fields” Jack didn’t need to be the seventh son of a seventh son to know that the man with the scar on his forehead and his ear neatly amputated was in reality one of the leaders of the gang of oil crooks who was trying to rob his father and, doubtless, all of the other American stockholders out of their holdings.

That Señor Lopear, as Jack called him for want of his real name, was in Juarez, at Terrazas, where the oil fields are located and which they were bound for, or somewhere between these chief points, Jack hadn’t the slightest doubt. Further, it seemed more than probable

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that he had either proceeded or else followed them into Mexico for the express purpose of preventing them from learning at first hand the truth about the condition of the *Mexican Consolidated Oil Company, Ltd.*

Since they had not been molested the night before he felt all the more certain that the enemy would attack them that night, and this time, he reasoned, it would be in force. So as they rode serenely along Jack did a little stroke of thinking to the end that they might throw the bandits who were following them off of their trail—a mighty hard thing to do in a district where most of the Mexicans live by the allied crimes of robbery and murder.

“I’ve got an idea, Bill,” he said seriously as one who had concocted a great scheme.

“Give it to me and I’ll eat it,” replied Bill jocosely, but who in reality was as hungry as an ostrich.

“No kidding about this idea. I’ve had a *hunch* all morning that we’re scheduled to run into trouble to-night and the chances are that instead of having to match up with one we’ll have to contend with half a dozen of these half-breeds or even more.

“It’s easy to see, isn’t it, from the run-in we had yesterday with the *Bad Hombre* that old Lopear must be pretty well informed of our moves, and that he’ll know just where to find us to-night and attack us unless we outwit him.”

“Fine idea, Jack,” agreed Bill, “but if old Lopear is as well informed as you give him credit for, how can we hope to fool him?”

“That’s where my big idea comes in. We’ll make a wide detour of this town we’re coming to so that we won’t be seen. Then we’ll hit the trail again and skirt the railroad for, say, four or five miles and picket our animals in some well hidden spot. This done, we’ll walk back to town. There will be, most likely, a train coming through sometime to-night and we’ll board her.

“Lopear will learn from his spies that we have discarded our horses, which would be the most natural thing in the world for us to do, and taken the train on south. This move on our part will, if I am not very much mistaken, upset any plan of his to ‘get us’ to-night.

“When we’ve reached the place where we’ve picketed our horses, we’ll drop off of the train.

Then we'll bivouac for the night and go on our way to-morrow on horse rejoicing. The idea is that Lopear will think we're going to make the rest of the trip by rail. How about it, Bill?"

"It's O. K.," ejaculated his pal. "You're right there with the goods when it comes to figurin' out the enemy's moves, and you'll be a Gin'ral in the Army yet as sure as the handle on my name is Bill."

So it was that they made their circuitous way around the little burg of San Blas. A short way beyond it they crossed the *Rio San Marie*, which was really an *arroyo*,* that is, a small stream, and rode on until they came in sight of Guzman, the next town. Fortunately there was quite a grade at this point so that a train must needs go slow in negotiating it.

At some distance away from the railroad they came to a maze of giant cactuses and in the center of this weird forest of spines they picketed their horses and started back to San Blas. Walking is a hard game in that kind of a country and they did not get there until late in the afternoon. From the station agent they learned

* Pronounced a-roi'-o.

that a southbound train was due in forty-five minutes.

“So far so good,” exclaimed Jack; “luck is certainly with us. Say, Bill, do you see that *hombre* over there sizing us up. Either this heat is getting on my nerves or he’s one of old Lopear’s spies. What do you think?”

As if to confirm this supposition the *cholo-boy* referred to, a villainous-looking scoundrel who was armed to the teeth, mounted his horse and, heading south, was lost to sight in the twinkling of an eye, leaving only a cloud of alkali dust to indicate his course.

“I hope he doesn’t stumble on to our horses.”

“Not much chanst,” returned Bill; “a man isn’t going to ride through a cactus thicket just for the fun of the thing. Besides he has other business to attend to, take it from me.”

Feeling quite assured that everything was going well with them, the boys went over to a restaurant, or *fonda*, as the Mexicans call it, but which according to Bill’s lingo was a “quick and dirty,” and had a bite to eat.

The warning long-drawn toot of the locomotive whistle smote their ears and told them

that time was up. They waited until the train was pulling out before they left the eating house and they barely had time to board her from the rear end. They went into the car to make things "look reg'lar," as Bill said.

When San Blas had been left behind far enough so that they could not be seen they emerged again and sat on the rear platform. As the grade was reached and the train slowed up in taking it they dropped off. Still the train was going fast enough so that neither of them landed right side up, as a hobo would have done, and they were pretty well shaken up.

Taken all in all, however, it was a risky piece of business, but the boys were playing a hazardous game for big stakes and it was all in the day's work for them to run long chances. Then came a search of some ten minutes before they could locate the cactus thicket where their horses were picketed.

They decided to press on by night as the going was cooler and they would not run so much risk of their trick being discovered by Lopear's spies. Hardly had they started when far down the track the sky was brightly illuminated by a lightning-like flash; this was quickly followed

by a dull roar and after that came a curious flickering red light.

Dangerous as they realized it was for them to go on in the face of this strange development, the curiosity of these boys, who had fought through the great World War, was too impulsive to be checked. So they urged their horses along in the direction of the light and after covering two or three miles they were able to see the cause of it all.

The train from which they had jumped was wrecked; the cars were derailed and piled up on top of each other, and as they were of the ancient wooden kind they were burning furiously. The train had been dynamited!

The boys dismounted and picketed their horses and then crept up within eye-range. Lined up against the side of one of the cars that had thus far escaped the flames and was still intact were some thirty passengers, while strewn around the wreckage were as many more who were either dead or dying.

Two or three masked bandits covered the line of the living with their rifles and heavy forty-fives while two more dynamitards were collecting their valuables. Time was, in the

frontier days of the United States, when one or more bandits of the Frank and Jesse James variety would hold up a train and make the passengers "elevate and donate," and this took real nerve.

But not so with these cowardly *greaser* bandits. They dynamited the train first and killed as many of the crew and passengers as possible, for it was easier and safer to rob dead men than those who were alive.

The hissing steam from the demolished locomotive, the lurid flickering of the burning cars and the agonizing cries of burnt and bruised victims made one of the most terrible scenes the boys had ever looked upon, and they had witnessed some very awful ones indeed.

The boys crawled still closer to the wreck until they were within earshot and then there came to them the full meaning of the dynamited train. One of the bandits, who was evidently the leader, shouted: "Are they there, Chilili?"

"No," replied the masked robber thus addressed, "the Gringo dogs are nowhere to be found."

A closer scrutiny of the man Chilili disclosed the fact that he carried his arm in a sling and

that he was none other than the *Bad Hombre* whom Jack had plugged in the shoulder the day before.

“Carrajo!” hissed the leader; “what a fool of a pig you are to let them slip through your fingers so easily.”

“Maybe they weren’t on the train, Señor,” whined Chilili.

“Dog, do you say I lie? I tell you José here, with his own eyes saw them getting ready to board it at San Blas,” said the leader emphatically as he drew his revolver to carry conviction with his words.

“A thousand pardons, Señor. If you say José saw them ready to board the train they must be on it still.”

“Two hundred measly *pesos* for the night’s work,” shouted the leader in a rage, indicating the meager pile of booty that had been taken from the sheep-like passengers. Not one *centavo* shall you blunderers have, and no more will you ever get from me until you find those slippery young *Americanos*.”

CHAPTER V

THROUGH THE DESERT

DISGUSTED with the night's work, in that it failed to reveal the Americanos and yielded practically no booty, the bandits mounted their horses and rode away. As soon as they were safely gone Jack and Bill mingled with the stunned and stricken passengers, started a couple of messengers to San Blas and two more to Guzman for help while they worked like Trojans rendering first-aid service to those who were in need of it.

An hour later a band of Mexicans came galloping up the trail, and not being sure whether they were citizens come to succor the wounded, or were the bandits returning to the scene of their crime, the boys again concealed themselves. Learning that it was a friendly cavalcade from San Blas, Jack and Bill concluded it would be the better part of prudence anyway to leave the wounded in their hands and to proceed on their way.

They felt quite assured now of a night of peace and quiet, and Bill congratulated Jack on the successful working out of his *hunch*, though he did not express it in just these words. The way their lives had been saved seemed to them nothing short of a miracle and it's just such narrow escapes as this that lead lucky folks to the belief that they bear charmed lives.

When they had packed the mule again and gotten everything in readiness they rode silently away from the dreadful scene of wreckage and suffering and were headed once more for the oil fields.

"This is the hundred and thirtieth train that has been dynamited by outlaws in Mexico in the last hundred days, according to my count," commented Jack soberly; "it's a wonder Uncle Sam stands for it."

"More than one a day! Gee, life is awful cheap down here even if everything else is dear," followed up Bill. "A Harlem undertaker would do a rushing business and get rich quick if he'd open up shop, wouldn't he?"

"Do you know, Bill, I believe I've seen the leader of that train-wrecking gang somewhere before, but I'm not quite sure because there

was so much commotion. I'm almost certain, though, that it was that double-dyed criminal, old Lopear."

"That sounds reasonable," affirmed Bill, who was more than ready now to believe anything that Jack might say. "It seems as if this mangy old coyote won't be satisfied until he does us dirt."

"He may do it yet, but so far we've had all the best of it."

"If I ever get half a chanst at him I'm going to fill him full of lead," vowed Bill, whose primitive instincts to annihilate an enemy had not yet been squelched by the civilization of centuries and the atmosphere of New York life.

And so they rode and talked and talked and rode until the first pale streaks of dawn lit up the horizon and they were both of a mind that it was high time to rest. Again they picketed their animals, pitched their tarpaulin, ate a hearty breakfast and went to sleep out there in the desert without the formality of a guard.

They slept through the broiling hot day dead to the world, they were that tired, nor did they wake up until late in the afternoon.

"By George, I'm thirsty," yawned Jack as he reached for his canteen. He raised the vessel to his lips, tilted it up a little and lowered it again.

"Empty?" queried Bill, "here, take mine."

Again Jack raised the canteen but with no better luck than before.

"I'll get some from the cask," said Bill, taking the canteens with him, but when he came back there was a strange look in his eyes.

"Now we *are* up against it. In our hurry and excitement to help them poor people that was wrecked last night, we forgot to look after our water supply. The price of a mistake of this kind is usually the lives of the fellows who make them, and the bones of men who forget are bleaching from one end of the desert to the other. No tellin' in this blasted country where the next water hole is."

"Cheer up, Bill, there's got to be a town along the railroad within the next twenty miles or so and if we push along we can reach it by dark. I guess we can stick it out that long, so let's move *pronto*."

They had watered their horses at a hole the night before and anyway their animals were

cayuses of the desert breed and, camel-like, they were accustomed to going without water for long stretches at a time. After they had traveled a few miles they saw what looked to be the *casa* (house) of a *hacendado* (planter). It looked to be only a mile away, but the atmosphere is so clear in the desert stretches that distances are very deceptive. Bill's practiced eye, though, recognized it as a four- or five-mile ride.

After considering whether it would be better to go straight on to the next town or to make the detour and ride over to the *hacienda* (farm), they concluded to take the latter course, for a man athirst in the desert lets nothing stand between him and the water he wants. As they drew nearer the *hacienda* they saw that the *casa* was one of goodly size, with a few laurel trees planted around it, offering kindly shade and—glory of glories—there was a well, and a well laid out system of irrigating ditches.

They approached the place cautiously, not knowing what manner of man or men they might encounter. But once there it didn't take half-an-eye to see that this bold experiment in farming in the desert had not been a successful

one, for the place had long since been abandoned. What the boys next saw was well calculated to strike out courage and substitute despair in the strongest of hearts. It was monstrous and inconceivable and made their eyes bulge from their sockets. The well had caved in and there was not a drop of water to be had!

Jack was so thirsty he was about all in and Bill was not far behind him. Then it was that this same Bill Adams, the boy who never had a chance and to whom abstract knowledge was as a sealed book, showed a glimmer of concrete intelligence that more than made up for all his lack of school learning.

On the giant cactus grows the prickly pear, which, like a water-melon, is composed chiefly of water. Bill took his *rietto*, or lariat as we call it, and lassoed the fruit, which he caught before it reached the ground. From this fruit they got enough water to keep them from dying of thirst, but by no means enough to quench it.

Wearily they turned their horses toward the railroad, with Urrutia, the nearest town to the south, as their objective point. They had not gone many miles before their tongues began to

dry out and when the drying process was well under way their instruments of speech and taste began to swell and burn.

The animals, too, hardy as they were, began to show their need of water by slowing up their gait. The desert sun beat down as fiercely as ever, with no relief in sight, for they had at least ten miles more to go before Urrutia could be made. Not long afterward the horses began to behave strangely and all but refused to go on. They acted as if they had eaten *loco* weed, a kind of poisonous plant that gives a horse an imagination all out of proportion to his good judgment. *Loco* is a Spanish word that means *crazy*.

The mule performed very much better than the horses and, although a trifle shaky in the knees, she struggled pluckily onward. Both boys and beasts presented a most pitiable sight with their parched and swollen tongues lolling out of their mouths. So that they might make more rapid progress Jack and Bill dismounted and staggered on, backed up only by the hardy grit of American youth, and put their last efforts into reaching Urrutia—and water.

Then the vague outline of the town loomed

up on the horizon—or was it a mirage—only a few miles down the blazing ribbands of steel rails. The horses, wise animals that they were, pricked up their dejected ears, quit acting foolish and pushed on with renewed energy, born of sensing that water was near.

Again the boys mounted them and an hour and a half later they were in the town at the pump in the *plaza*. They gave the animals a little water before they themselves tasted it. Little by little they slaked their burning thirst until they had all of the life-giving liquid they wanted.

It had been a strenuous twenty-four hours, and Jack and Bill decided that for their own good as well as for the good of their horses they had better lay over and rest until the following morning. Like all good horsemen, the first concern of the boys was for their animals and after they had fed and taken care of them they sought out food and lodging for themselves. Both of these they secured at *El Imparcial*, a jim-crow little hotel hard by the town pump.

As they went in they noticed that a number of *vaqueros* were seated at tables round about

the room, a few drinking *mescal*, the favorite tippie of the Mexicans. It is a drink made from the juice of the Agave plant and as fierce a concoction as was ever manufactured by the pale-faces under the name of fire-water. Others were playing *monte*, a gambling game played with a Spanish pack of cards.

Bill, he of the primitive instincts, could never resist the temptation to watch a game of cards and he stopped for a few moments to look on, and Jack showed signs of interest, too.

"Queer looking cards, aren't they," allowed Jack, who had never seen their like before.

"They're Spanish cards," said Bill, and then he explained: "the regular Spanish deck has only forty cards in it and they are a trifle narrower and about four times greasier than our cards are. These *hombres* use them altogether down here and you'll find them in the border towns of Texas, too."

"Judging from their appearance no one but a Mexican could play with them," was Jack's comment.

"Oh, I don't know," was Bill's rejoinder; "once you *savvy* them they are just as easy to play with as our cards at home, and I used to

believe when I played with Longhorn Whittaker and Señor Fernando Gomez that I could play some cards with a Spanish deck."

It was then somewhere in the neighborhood of three o'clock in the afternoon, and as the boys had had a particularly trying day and were worn out by their sufferings in the desert they had only two outstanding ideas, the first of which was to eat and the second was to go to bed.

Mexican cooking is pretty good when it is good, and Señora Quintero, the wife of *el dueño* (the owner), was all that could be hoped for this side of Mexico City, and so to these hungry youngsters the grub was first class in every particular. And such beds! They were not much as beds go in the States, but they were Waldorf-Astoria to the young prospectors who had been sleeping on the desert sands. As Jack expressed it, "It was paradise enow!"

That evening as the burning ball of fire was slipping down the hill of the world over in the west there came into town half a dozen hard-riding Mexicans. To the ordinary observer they looked like any other bunch of *vaqueros* out for an evening of pleasure, if burning their

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lights out with *mescal*, and losing their ill-gotten *pesos* at Spanish *monte* could be called pleasure. At any rate it was their chief pastime when not engaged in cock-fights or using the *bastinado*, figuratively speaking, on some poor *Americano*.

But if either of the boys who were "wrapped in the arms of Murphy," as Bill called *Morpheus*, could have seen the newcomers they would have instantly recognized among them the figure of a *greaser* whom they had once met before, to wit: the *Bad Hombre of Chilili*. His arm still seemed a little *game*, but the wound in his shoulder had healed sufficiently so that a sling was no longer needed.

Answers to Chilili's inquiries were evidently to his liking, for he closed his yellow teeth and, drawing his lips apart, he simulated a grin which was his way of showing his satisfaction. He had been on the right trail after all and now, at last, the Gringo dogs were in the hotel and at his mercy. It was all so easy that he really permitted himself to laugh out loud, an almost unheard-of achievement on his part and one which his men took cognizance of.

As you will recall, Chilili had twice been out-

witted by the Americano boys and his chief, old Lopear, had evinced in no uncertain a fashion his displeasure at the gigantic piece of stupidity his lieutenant showed in letting, as he thought, the boys get away when the train was dynamited.

Chilili, smarting keenly under this rebuke from Lopear, as well as from the remembrance of the ignoble way in which he got the wound in his shoulder, was resolved that this, the third time, he would make good, and he had now reached a point where he did not care whether he brought the two Americano boys to his chief dead or alive.

He imparted this choice bit of information to his partners in crime as the cavalcade swooped down the narrow street. They reined up short in front of the '*dobe* hotel, dismounted before their horses had yet come to full stop, and tied the latter to a hitching rack in front of the place.

Not to be *gypped* this time, Chilili drew his revolver and confidently swaggered into the hotel. A quick glance from his bead-like eyes showed him that his quarry was not there. He spoke rapidly to the proprietor and then both

of them talked at once, as is the wont of the Latin races. From this breech-loading, automatic back-action, double-barreled conversation he was able to gather that the *Americanos* had taken a room for the night and were, even at this early hour, occupying it. It was the first room at the head of the stairs, he was informed.

Chilili seated himself at a table with his companion robbers, called loudly for *mescal*, and as they sat there drinking he boastfully unfolded his scheme for capturing single-handed the Gringo-dogs in the room above. After a drinking bout, one of his men produced the inevitable greasy deck of *monte* cards and with the others he started a game. As they understood it they would not be needed and so no longer concerned themselves about the affair.

The stone steps leading to the floor above to the sleeping rooms, or *dormitorios* as they call them in Spanish, were built on the outside of the hotel—not much of an improvement over the ladders used by the Hopi Indians. At the top of the steps ran a narrow balcony along the wall for nearly the length of the end and opening on this balcony were the doors leading to the rooms.

There were no window openings on this side of the 'dobe, all of these being located on the sides and at the opposite end. These openings, which were near the eaves, were fitted only with heavy shutters, for glass is seldom used where summer heat prevails the year 'round. The purpose of this construction, let it be known, is so that marauders, which were as thick in this part of the country as flies in the coffee, would find it a hard job to effect an entrance.

After a hand or two had been dealt around Chilili dropped out of the game and *vamoosed* outside. On reaching the steps he drew his revolvers from their ornately carved holsters and cocked them. Then he quietly went up the stone steps leading to the balcony and on reaching the top he tapped lightly on the nearest door with the muzzle of his revolver.

Stepping back a pace he waited. As there was no response forthcoming Chilili grew impatient and he knocked again—this time a trifle louder. Came then Bill's gruff and sleepy voice:

"Who'sit?"

"It is me, Señor, Manual Quintero," lied Chilili softly.

"All right, Manual, glad to meet you. Now you can go back to bed," was Bill's sarcastic rejoinder.

"Ah, but, Señor, it is of *mucho* importance," continued Chilili, curbing his voice to as soft a pitch as possible, "and it is very dangerous for me to be seen here in the balcony talking to you. Please, Señor, open the door."

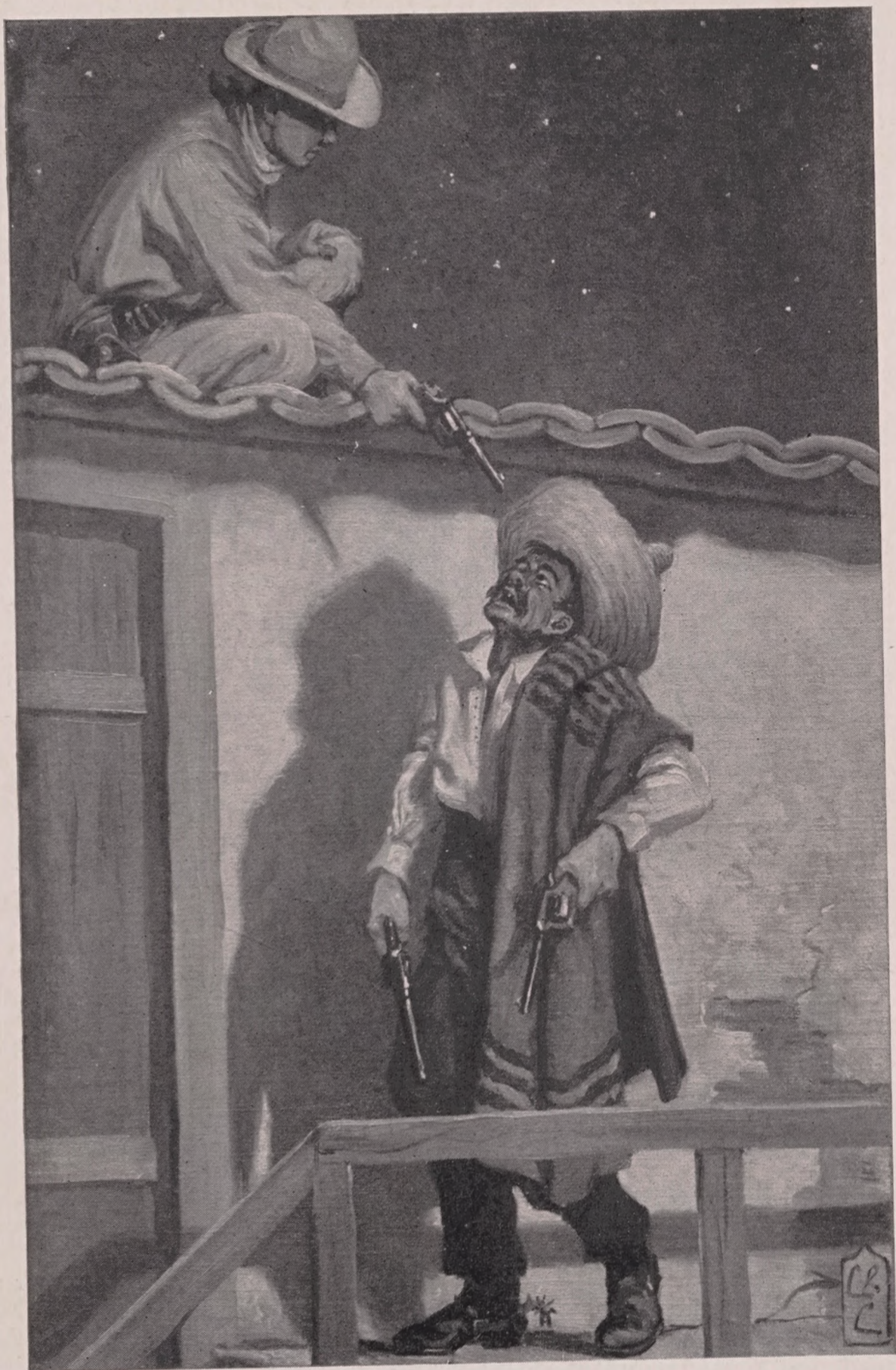
"Who did you say you are?" again queried Bill, evidently a little wider awake.

"Manual Quintero," answered Chilili, who by this time was thoroughly exasperated by the Americano's slow methods of doing business. "I am the *propietario* of the hotel."

"Oh, I understand now," announced the voice on the other side; "wait till I get my pants on and I'll open the door."

Chilili stood tense, his guns balanced in his hands, waiting for the door to open. A slight noise on the roof, the edge of which was only a couple of feet above his head, caused him to raise his eyes and the next instant he was looking into the barrel of a .45.

"One move, one word, Chilili, and I'll blow the top of your ornery head off," said Jack, who was the man back of the gun.



“ ‘ONE MOVE, ONE WORD, CHILILI, AND I’LL BLOW THE TOP OF YOUR HEAD OFF’ ”—Page 86

The old Mex rascal, noted for his cunning among his own cowardly cut-throats, was as so much cheese when pitted against the wits of the American boys. It is this kind of initiative and daring that has made the United States what she is to-day and a nation to be feared.

Chilili was too dumbfounded to do anything except to stand with his lower jaw hanging in amazement.

“Put your revolvers in their holsters,” commanded Jack in his low, even voice; “and turn your back toward the door, *pronto*.”

Chilili had on a previous occasion learned to his sorrow that Jack was a better and quicker man in every respect with the six-guns than himself. Consequently he hastened to obey, for however lightly he valued the lives of others, he prized his own hide highly.

Almost simultaneously he heard the door open behind him and felt the muzzle of a gun jammed into the small of his back.

Then this command from Bill: “Now, *Mr. Bad Hombre*, just do a little backward march into the room here and oblige yours truly.”

Chilili backed into the room, muttering under his breath, but he was not invoking evil on the

heads of his young captors; instead he was calling himself several kinds of a fool for not having brought his lieutenant with him, so that at least the odds would have been even, as the Irishman said.

Jack dropped lightly to the balcony and followed him. Once inside, the boys relieved him of his shooting irons, gagged him so that he could make no sound and tied him securely to one of the beds. Tying is part of a sailor's education, so Bill tied his hands back of him and then drawing his feet up he bound them to his hands.

"There," said Bill as he finished the job, "I've got the old skulking coyote trussed up like a New England turkey ready to hang on a spit to be roasted."

Not caring about taking the chance of meeting Chilili's gang, which Jack knew he had brought with him, the boys made a rope out of the blankets of the bed. Tying one end to the bed-post, Bill tossed the other end out of the window.

Down this improvised rope he slid and Jack followed him, hurling back the taunt as he crawled out over the window-sill: "Better luck

next time, Chilili. Only next time when we meet I'm going to shoot first and ask questions afterward."

Once on *terra firma* they tiptoed around to the front of the place and cautiously looked into the hotel. There, inside, as they had confidently expected to find them, still sat Chilili's gang of bandits drinking *mescal* and playing *monte* without the slightest suspicion in the world that ill luck had befallen their chief, the *Bad Hombre*.

While Bill went around to the stable where they had put up their horses, to saddle them and to pack the mule, which he was able to do alone by using the *square-hitch*, Jack deliberately untied the six horses belonging to the bandits from the hitching-rack and tied them all together by their bridles. In an incredibly short time Bill returned with their own horses, which they lost no time in mounting, and leading the bandits' horses after them they quietly rode out of town.

After they had covered some ten miles they released the animals they had taken, turned them around toward town, and the animals, in

horse fashion, trotted slowly and aimlessly back together.

"We certainly had a close shave that time, Bill," spoke up Jack, when they were well out of the frying pan.

"What I'd like to know is how you ever came to get up?" asked his partner.

"It was this way," explained Jack; "that little room was so beastly hot I woke up almost suffocated. I went over to the window and leaned out to get a breath of fresh air, when I saw Chilili and his gang riding up the street. I recognized the old coyote the moment I laid my eyes on him.

"Then I woke you up to tell you that he was downstairs waiting for us. But I have to hand it to you, Bill, for your scheme of having me crawl out of the window, up on to the roof and stick Chilili up while he was waiting for you to open the door."

"Don't mention it, Jack," replied that worthy, "I may look fat but I'm not thick all the time."

CHAPTER VI

INTO THE OIL FIELDS

ACCORDING to the information Jack's father had given him before he left New York the wells of the *Mexican Consolidated Oil Company, Ltd.*, were located at or near the town of Terrazas. They had ridden boldly through Sabinal, San Pedro, Summit and Corralitos and had seen neither hide nor hair of either the *Bad Hombre* or Señor Lopear.

Terrazas was, they figured, about thirty-five miles from Corralitos, the town they had just left behind them. They crossed the Rio Casa Grande a mile outside of the town and, since there were no other settlements or towns between Corralitos and Terrazas, they thought it better to follow the trail leading along the river, or *arroyo* as it really is, than the shorter one which runs parallel to the railroad. The Rio Casa Grande flows south by southeast from Corralitos for a distance of fifteen miles, then bends to the west and touches at Terrazas.

Once safely clear of Corralitos the boys slackened their pace and for the first time since they had entered Mexico they felt comparatively safe from being harassed by either Lopear or his gang of assassins.

“I don’t believe the *Bad Hombre* will trouble us again,” said Bill optimistically; “he’s come to the conclusion that you’re no slouch at playin’ *bad man* yourself. I knew by the way he acted when we were trussin’ him up that he was scared stiff, and once you throw a good scare into a bad Mexican he doesn’t get over it for a long, long time.”

“When I told him that next time I’d shoot first and ask questions afterward I meant it. You know what he’d have done if he’d had the drop on us. He’d have plugged us without the slightest compunction and then have dragged us by our necks at the end of a rope tied to his saddle to that miserable blood-thirsty chief of his. According to my way of thinking we’ve been altogether too easy on him. I’m getting mighty tired of letting this cheap *greaser* pester us. All I hope now is that on reaching Terrazas we can get some kind of a line on what’s been going on at the *Mexican Consolidated* wells and

then get out of this bloomin' country as quick as horses will carry us.

"You see, Bill, as far as the United States is concerned, the whole trouble started when Uncle Sam wouldn't recognize Villa," continued Jack, who was in a talkative mood for the first time since they crossed the border. "At that time Villa was friendly to Americans and all of his advisers were Americans. Then when Carranza was officially backed up by the government at Washington for President, of course Villa couldn't see it that way at all because he had kind of figured out that he was the man for the job, so naturally he had no further use for the United States.

"Villa was the only man in Mexico who was bloody enough, and murderous enough, to have coped successfully with the bandits and revolutionists that overrun the country from one end of it to the other. As things now stand the Mexicans haven't the slightest use for the Americans since the Carranzistas have been liberally supplied with money by the Germans and, hence, a white man doesn't stand the ghost of a show down here. Just before we left home I read in the papers that foxy old Carranza had

got up a fine scheme to bring all of the American owned mines, oil wells, and everything else in Mexico that is worth a *peso*, under the ownership of the Mexican government."

"How's he goin' to do it?" asked Bill, blinking his eyes.

"The way he's going to do it is like this: before a fellow can prospect for oil or do any drilling he must obtain a permit. But in order to get such a permit he must agree in advance that any and all wells he drills will become the property of the Mexican government. In other words he finds the oil and then turns it over to the government without compensation. This scheme will effectually keep out further American prospectors, while the going wells that Americans own, either in whole or in part, will be retrieved by crook, yes, even if they have to send a second-story man and safe blower to Montclair to get the stock."

"There's only one way things will ever be straightened out in this country and that's by Uncle Sam comin' down here and beatin' the ears off these *greasers* until they know they've been done up," was Bill's solution for an international problem that has kept even President

Wilson guessing ever since he has been in office.

"I hope the U. S. will do something soon, it looks to me as if that's the only way my father will ever break even on this oil stock of his and I suppose he's only one of thousands of other Americans in the same boat. But what's that I see looming up yonder in the distance?" exclaimed Jack, shading his eyes with his hand.

"Terrazas, or you can strike me dead with a belayin' pin!" cried Bill in great good humor.

"You're not on board ship now, matie, and there isn't such a thing as a belaying pin within a thousand miles of here," laughed Jack.

"I was only speakin' paragorically," apologized his partner.

Although Terrazas had promised a couple of years before to gush into an oil district which would compare favorably with that of Tampico on the east coast of Mexico, what with the bandits in Chihuahua and the continued policy of Carranza to drive the Americans from Mexico, it was all but dead. As it was, what the boys saw as they rode down the main street of the oil town was roughly built wooden shacks lined up

on either side which served as stores, restaurants and hotels.

Back of them were any number of ungainly derricks, whose tops poked into the air to heights varying from seventy to eighty feet. There was one noticable thing lacking, though, and that was the hustle and bustle which always pervades a live oil town of any magnitude. It was hard for the boys to believe that Terrazas had ever been a booming town filled with *wild-catters*, as oil prospectors are nicknamed, and all the rest of the motley crew that congregates where treasures are taken from the bowels of the earth. The numerous towering rigs spoke more plainly than words of the once successful oil wells which were now closed down. There they found not only the *Mexican Consolidated* wells, of which Jack's father was one of the largest owners, but also those of several other concerns both small and large, a couple of them American, a few more British, and the rest all German and Mexican owned.

The boys were fascinated by the grim rigs and giant derricks, which are not only used for drilling the wells but for pumping the oil from them after they are drilled. They were sur-

prised, too, at the number of wells in the district and the immense amount of work that had been done to get this great industry into operation in Terrazas. And all to no purpose, for nine-tenths of the wells were closed down.

Small wonder that Jack and Bill took such a lively interest in what they saw, for there is something uncanny about the finding of hidden treasures in this old earth of ours, be it doubloons buried by pirates who sailed the Spanish main, gold that has to be fought for in Alaska, precious stones that are found on the coast of Africa, or the equally valuable and far more useful oil that flows from the wells in Mexico.

All oil as it comes from the earth is *crude oil*, *rock oil*, *mineral oil* or *petroleum*, as it is variously called, and this contains a number of other oils, the best known of which are *kerosene* and *gasoline*. Sometimes *kerosene* is called *petroleum*, but this is entirely wrong, for *petroleum* is the oil as it comes from the well.

This crude oil, or petroleum, is a dark, yellowish-brown inflammable liquid as it comes from the well. The word petroleum is formed by combining the Greek word *petros*, which

means *rock*, and the Latin word *oleum*, which means *oil*, hence petroleum means *rock-oil*, and you will presently discover why it is called so.

Petroleum, or rock-oil, has been known and used for many centuries. In Egypt and Indo-China history tells us that *bitumen*, which is *pitch*, was in use in very early times. In Peru, petroleum was probably known for hundreds of years before the occupation of South America by the Spanish, for an old Spanish book printed in 1569 describes in a very amusing way—at least it is amusing to us now—the method of obtaining it from the earth. It is as follows:

“Of a Gumme that is taken out from under the Grounde. . . . In the Callao, being a Country of Peru, there is a province which does not bear any tree or any plante, because the grounde is full of Gummes, and from this grounde the Indians take out a licour that serveth them to heal many diseases and to take it out they use it in this manner.

“They make of the Earth certeyne sesternes, very greate and set them upon timber or canes and underneath they put a thing that may reserve the licour which commeth out of them

and they place them in the Sunne and with its heate and its strength thereof the Gumme is melted or the licour which the Earth hath and the sesterns remayne without any licour which profiteth to make fire of, for in that place there are no trees or any other thing to make fire of.

“And it is an evill light, for it casteth out black smoke and an horrible smell and for all this, seeing they have no other thing to make fire of, they take a paynes with it. The licour which cometh forthwith of it, profiteth for many diseases, especially when they depend on colds or cold causes. It does away any grieve of the sayde cause and all swellinges which come thereof. They heale all evilles which the Carana and the Tacamboca doo heale. That which they sent me is a red colour somewhat darke, and it hath a goode smell.”

This then is the method by which the primitive Indians of Peru obtained oil from the ground and since the civilization of the Incas of Peru and the Nahuans of Mexico were about alike there is no doubt but that the aborigines of Mexico did likewise.

Exactly how mother nature made crude oil, or petroleum, is not certainly known even to

the scientists of to-day. There are two ideas as to how it was formed just as there are two theories concerning nearly everything else. Thus it is that chemists believe that petroleum is of *inorganic* origin, which means that it is the result of chemical action of carbon and hydrogen when they come in contact with each other underground.

Geologists, on the other hand, believe that petroleum is of *organic* origin, due to the slow decomposition of plant or animal remains. And here again the geologists are divided, for while some claim that the oil is of former plant life which grew in prehistoric marshes, others hold that the oils are in all respects the same as those composed of animals we find in the ocean to-day.

And so it is supposed that the light colored crude oil found in Pennsylvania is of vegetable origin, while the dark and heavy crudes of the Gulf states and Mexico are thought to be of animal origin.

To prove his theory that crude oil is formed by the remains of animals that lived in the sea, Prof. Engler produced artificially from fish oil

a kerosene which could not be told from that which is distilled from crude oil.

Be all of the above as it may, it has been found that petroleum is always associated with salt and water and this may yet prove to be the secret of the mysterious formation of rock oils. To this fact, too, curiously enough, was due the beginning of the great American petroleum industry, for although, as you have seen, the Indians knew of the existence of oil in the earth and used it as a cure-all, the real method of obtaining it was discovered or devised by the American salt-makers of pioneer days.

In those early days the difficulty of bringing salt from its natural sources over the Allegheny mountains caused the salt men to seek elsewhere for a supply. Thus it was that they were led to investigate certain salt springs in Pennsylvania which had been brought to light by wild animals, or *salt-licks*, as the pioneers called them.

At first these springs yielded enough salt for their purposes but later the salt men were obliged to dig more springs so that they could get the *brine* they needed from which to make

their salt by evaporation. In doing this, however, they were greatly troubled by a black, oily liquid which floated on top of the brine and had a very disagreeable odor. They couldn't *savvy* it at all, as Bill would say.

For a good many years after this crude oil was a bugbear to the salt-makers and its only use was for medicinal purposes, for, as you have already learned, it was supposed to cure many ailments. But there was a bigger and better use for it and this was for illuminating purposes, and once that kerosene had been distilled from it, the dizzy light of the candle was seen no more.

Fish, whale and lard oil had been used from time out of mind for lighting purposes, that is, a wick having its lower end put into the oil would cause the latter to rise to the upper end of it by what is called in physics *capillary attraction*, when it could be lit. That crude oil was also used for this purpose there is not the slightest doubt.

The idea of drilling a well to get oil, as a well is drilled to obtain water, does not, however, seem to have occurred to any one until about the middle of the last century. Then, in 1859,

the first oil well was drilled in the United States by E. L. Drake and his *stillman*, who went by the name of "Uncle Billy" Smith.

This pioneer oil well was located on the banks of Oil Creek, Pennsylvania, and since that time about two hundred thousand wells have been drilled and more than three billion barrels have been produced from the various wells in the United States which have since been opened. A great deal has been said about the coal supply giving out but there is much more danger of the oil supply giving out, for while only about one per cent of the coal in the United States is exhausted, 30 per cent of the oil has already been used.

With the increased use of kerosene, gasoline and lubricating oils, all of which is obtained by distilling crude oil, for running internal combustion engines of every description, including stationary units of one up to a thousand horsepower, and for every conceivable purpose from running a house pump or a bicycle to an airplane or a locomotive, it is natural that the United States should turn to Mexico for its future petroleum supply, and from this you can see that Mr. Heaton's judgment in investing

in *Mexican Consolidated* was fundamentally sound.

Another thing which convinced Jack that his father had been right in buying the block of stock was that since the discovery of oil on Oil Creek sixty years ago, or thereabouts, wells have been opened up right along on a line running at an angle of 45 degrees to the line which runs east and west through Oil Creek. This line passes through the most productive oil regions of Oklahoma and Texas and thence runs through that part of Chihuahua where the wells of the *Mexican Consolidated* are located.

Of course there is not one continuous pool of oil all the way along this imaginary line and there are many dry spots in between, but it is nevertheless a fact that nearly all of the oil which has so far been found lies in this general direction. In his brief experience as an oil engine salesman Jack had learned all of the above points and this is one of the reasons why he had advised his father to hang on to his stock even when the odds seemed so heavily against him.

Since the accumulation of petroleum deposits in the earth depends on the presence of coarse-

grained, porous rocks of a sandstone nature to form the reservoirs to hold it, geologists who have made a study of these rock formations are able to predict with a fair degree of accuracy where oil will be found. Erosion, which means the eating away of rocks by the action of water, has, as a rule, worn these formations on the surface of the earth into sand and, as a consequence, these sands are known as *oil sands*.

In the early days of oil prospecting there was a lot of *bunk* just as there is in every new thing. There were certain men who claimed to be *diviners*, or *oil smellers* as they were called, and they charged enormous prices for pretending to find oil veins or pools. This they did by means of what is known as a *divining rod*, or *finding stick*. It consists of a forked piece of witch-hazel or peach tree wood, and long before and for years after oil was found these so-called diviners used the stick to enable them, as they claimed, to find precious metals and all other kinds of hidden treasure, then water, and later on oil, in the earth.

While, of course, there's nothing in it, its interesting to know how they worked the scheme. They held the forked ends of the stick

between their thumbs and fingers with the large end out from their bodies and in a line with the surface of the earth. Then they walked about over the ground wherein the precious thing they wanted to discover was believed to be located. When they passed directly over it the large end of the stick was suddenly pulled down toward the earth, or at least that is what foolish people believed took place. Divining rods and oil smellers have now gone entirely out of date and scientific methods have taken their places.

Along the 45 degree line from Oil Creek, Pa., geologists, who are the real oil-smellers of today, have found certain formations of sandstone rock in the earth's crust which have proven to be the best locations for oil fields. In general these formations consist of upward folds of the rock. The peaks of these folds are known as *anticlines*, while the valleys between the peaks are known as *synclines*.

Underneath these folds the contour is similar to the surface contour and consequently domes are found. It is in these domes that the oil collects on top of the water because its *specific gravity*, or let's say its weight, is less than that of the water, and, hence, it floats.

On riding into Terrazas, Jack had at once been struck by the peculiar rock formation which certainly indicated that the region was full of oil. The odor of crude oil in the air permeated everything and it seemed clear to Jack that the wells which were closed down were closed not because of the exhaustion of the oil in that locality but because the Mexicans were determined to hog everything in sight.

“By the great horn spoon!” ejaculated Jack; “there’s oil here and a-plenty of it as sure as there’s a sun in the heavens above us. But what stumps me is why that German outfit is pumping oil while the *Mexican Consolidated* is shut down.”

“So is that American Company over there and this British outfit across the street,” pointed out Bill.

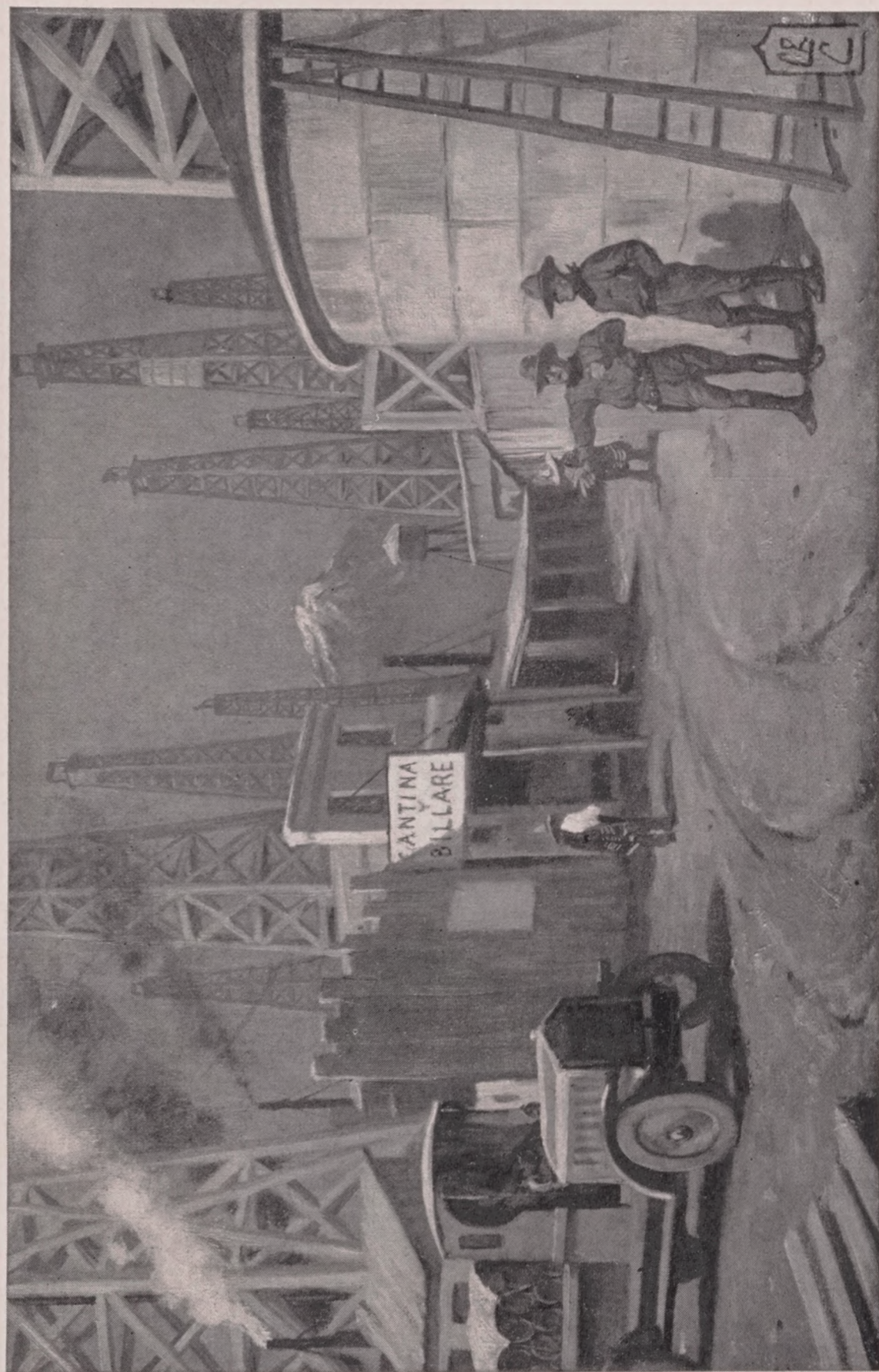
“The American and British Companies can’t operate because of the impossible conditions imposed on them by the Carranzista government, but what is in the way of the *Mexican Consolidated*, in which all of the officers are Mexicans, from doing business? Certainly a Mexican owned oil company could operate where all the others would fail.

Bill scratched his head. "I guess too many American dollars have been sunk into it. These *greasers* have got all the coin they can get out of the Americans and now they're going to have the oil wells, too. Clever birds, I calls them!"

"Zowie!" exclaimed Jack, "and I suspect that these Germans are in with them fifty-fifty on the deal. The Mexicans dearly love the Germans and when they can get rid of the Americans a bunch of German capitalists will back the *Mexican Consolidated* to the limit. And so the *Consolidated* shuts down, pulls off this fake stuff about the oil source being exhausted and think they're going to get away with it.

"On the other hand they know that unless they can get their hands on the stock that is owned by Americans they'll have a big row, so their idea is to buy up all of the outstanding American stock—for nothing. Failing to get it in this high-handed way they will even resort to stealing it as old Lopear did Dad's."

"You're right every time, Buddy," said Bill; "but we'll beat them to it yet."



"WHAT STUMPS ME IS WHY THAT GERMAN OUTFIT IS PUMPING OIL WHILE THE MEXICAN CONSOLIDATED IS SHUT DOWN."—Page 107

CHAPTER VII

THE ABANDONED GUSHERS

BRIGHT and early the next morning the boys were up and ready for the day's work. They were greatly refreshed after their sleep in something that approached a real bed, and after a Mexican breakfast, cooked by a Chinaman, for a couple of American boys, they felt in every way fit and proper.

"What's on your young mind for to-day?" Bill asked as they swung out on the street.

"Let's take a stroll out of earshot of these *greasers* and talk things over," said Jack, and when they were down the street a ways he unfolded his plan. "My idea of things is like this: first we'll scout out the wells of the *Mexican Consolidated*. Once on its property we'll give them the 'once over.' It is just possible that without much trouble we may be able to find out why the gushers have stopped gushing. At any rate, we'll pry the lid off of things and

'see why the darned thing doesn't work' as the kid said when he took his Ingersoll to pieces."

"It doesn't look as if we'll have any trouble takin' a look at the wells, things are so peaceful-like," agreed Bill sadly.

"Don't worry, Bill, there'll be enough excitement and some to spare before we get out of Terrazas. Naturally since there is something crooked going on the men back of the *Mexican Consolidated* have used every effort to prevent us from coming down here. Witness the attempt of scar-faced Lopear to get my Dad's securities and when he failed in this observe how strenuously his bandits tried to get us. On the other hand, we're here now in spite of their dastardly efforts. By the way, Bill, I learned last night that there are about fifty Americans here in town."

"Fifty Americans!" ejaculated Bill; "well fifty Americans are worth more than a thousand greasers any day."

"That's the reason the Mexicans won't molest us now," returned Jack. "They know that if they do, it will mean a deal of trouble for them and I don't believe those that are here are looking for trouble yet. Another thing, by this

time they have undoubtedly covered up their crooked work here as far as the *Consolidated* is concerned, since they know we are going to investigate the wells. I think that upon the extent they have covered up their dirty work will depend the amount of freedom we'll be given in investigating things."

"What you mean," reiterated Bill, just to make sure he understood aright, "is that the more they let us look around and about, the harder it will be for us to find out what's wrong and that we'll find everything is *Jake* on the face of things?"

"Exactly. Now, then, it's up to us to use our wits to see just where the *frame-up* comes in and in doing so we'll start on the supposition that the wells are O. K., and that the shut-down is due to some cooked-up scheme of the officers of the *Mexican Consolidated*. Now there's an American company here called the *Terrazas Petroleum Products Corporation* and I suggest that we go over there, have a little talk on the quiet with some one and get, if possible, some inside information regarding the real situation here."

"Let's go see," urged Bill, and the boys

did a *right about* and went back up the street again.

The office of the American firm, which was located in a large wooden shack, was just off the main street, and back of it were a dozen wells with their derricks. Not a wheel was turning and things were as dead as a door-nail.

"Maybe the wells *have* run dry," suggested Bill, for in his simple mind he couldn't believe that if there was oil in the wells the men who owned them could not make some arrangement and pump it out.

"Don't you believe it," was Jack's rejoinder, "but let's find out."

They went into the office of the *American Company* and there they asked for and met the General Manager. He was a big man with an out-of-door look and had the bearing of one who had been in many parts of the world and had seen much of it, especially in its hard phases. And like all men of wide experience, he proved to be a human being and not a living icicle.

You have probably very often met men who acted as if they were frozen stiff from the neck up and you can set it down that such a man is

one of very small experience in this world, though he may be a stockholder in the First National Bank. Mr. Richardson, for this was the General Manager's name, was the antithesis of the icicle type of man.

"Hello, strangers," he said, his big, pleasant voice filling the office and he shook hands with each of them heartily. "Welcome to our city. When did you fellows blow in? I didn't know an American could get nearer Terrazas than El Paso, or Vera Cruz. Sit down, boys, and tell me what I can do for you."

Jack, having a better command of the English language than Bill, acted as spokesman. He explained at some length the exciting ride they had had on their way down from El Paso, for Mr. Richardson knew what tremendous risks they had run.

"You are certainly a couple of nervy youngsters!" said he as he eyed the boys admiringly. "But what on earth brought you down here?"

Then Jack went into the details of their mission and told him of his suspicions concerning the *Mexican Consolidated*.

"Just a second," interrupted Mr. Richardson at a critical point in his story. "You say

that the second-story man and leader of the bandits had a part of one ear cut off?"

"Yes, and he had an ugly looking scar on his forehead, too," replied Jack.

"That is a strange coincidence because the promoter who is back of the *Mexican Consolidated* here is marked in exactly the same fashion. He looks as though a grizzly bear had wrestled with him, but I expect it was some greaser. He goes by the name of José Lopez, though I doubt very much if that is his right name. I haven't seen him around here for the past two or three weeks, but go on with your story."

When Jack told him about his distrust concerning the oil wells of the *Mexican Consolidated*, Mr. Richardson had this to say: "Oil wells differ greatly in the way in which they produce. While some produce at the outset, when the flow is greatest, only three or four barrels of oil a day, some of the big gushers produce a hundred thousand barrels a day. As a rule, wells which show such a large natural production when first tapped, usually quiet down quickly with a great decrease in produc-

tion, and such gushers have even been known to fail altogether."

"That's just what the *Mexican Consolidated* claims has happened to their wells," put in Jack, who began to wonder if his surmises had been wrong and that the wells had really given out.

"Then they are a lying pack of coyotes," bluntly asserted Mr. Richardson, and Bill and Jack exchanged significant glances of triumph.

"Look at this," he continued, taking from his desk a big blue-print map of the oil-fields of Terrazas; "here we are now," putting his finger-tip on a white square on the print. This square is the building you are in now; these twelve circles represent the rigs on our wells and as you see they are all located in a circle around that big 'dobe oil tank.

"There on the property, right next to us, are five more wells belonging to the *Chihuahua Oil Refining Company*, which is owned by German capitalists, and further on but adjoining these wells is the property of the *Mexican Consolidated Oil Company, Limited*, which is the one you boys are interested in. Now, look out of the window. What do you see?"

"Big doings at the German owned wells," spoke up Bill.

"Precisely," said Mr. Richardson and then he continued, "the *Chihuahua Company* is taking about fifty thousand barrels of oil a day from their wells. On the other hand both our Company on one side of them and the *Mexican Consolidated Company* on the other side of them are closed down. We have plenty of oil but we have been forced to shut down because the Mexican government claims that they own our wells.

"If we operate, the government will confiscate our oil and rather than submit to such an outrage we are waiting, Micawber-like, for 'something to turn up,' although this inactivity means a big loss to us. Why the *Mexican Consolidated* should shut down, I have not been able to fathom, for they have the full protection of their government and I know that all of their wells are producers."

"How can you be sure they are," Jack asked the manager of the Terrazas Company.

"That is easy," continued Mr. Richardson; "in the first place they were producing in the neighborhood of thirty thousand barrels up to

the day they shut down and, in the second place, they must have oil because we have oil and the *Chihuahua* has oil and we are all three of us located on and drawing from the same oil pool."

"I see," said Jack; "a while ago you mentioned that you were waiting for something to turn up."

"I am. Firm dealing with Mexico!" boomed Mr. Richardson's big voice decisively; "after Uncle Sam steps in, as he's bound to do any minute now, and gets us our rights we'll be able to reopen and not before."

"What did I tell you, Jack?" interrogated his partner.

"It can't come any too quick for me," said Jack. "Well, I guess we'll be vamoosing. Thanks for your kindness and the information, Mr. Richardson."

"You didn't tell me how you came to ride a-horseback down here instead of taking the train at Juarez," interjected Mr. Richardson.

"We thought we stood a better show of getting through. Every day for the last three months I've read of one or more trains that have been dynamited somewhere in Mexico. And then Bill and I believed we could throw

Lopear and his gang off the trail easier," explained Jack.

"At that they were on our heels from the time we left Juarez until we left Urrutia, but I guess we shook them there," Bill added.

"You are boys after my own heart, and I'm proud to know you. Now you fellows drop around any time you have a mind to and be sure to let me know if there is anything I can do for you. You know we Americans have got to stick together down here or else we will all be stuck separately," concluded Mr. Richardson, unconsciously paraphrasing Benjamin Franklin's famous saying. Then he added, "And—keep your eyes and ears open and your mouths shut. Adios."

The boys walked up as far as the German owned *Chihuahua* wells and after watching them work for a while they then doubled back down the street until they came to the wells of the *Mexican Consolidated Company*. Just as Mr. Richardson had said, all was hustle and business at the German wells where fifty thousand barrels of crude oil were taken out every day, while at the *Mexican Consolidated* not a pump was going.

“Mañana!” clamored Jack in disgust. (Mañana is pronounced *man-yan'-a* and is the Spanish word for *to-morrow*. It is the answer you always get when you want a Mexican to do anything for you. It is always *to-morrow* with him.)

“I’d be glad of the chanst to *mañana* some of these crooked *greasers* with the butt of my .45!” chipped in Bill, as he looked at the idle wells, with crude oil selling at three dollars a barrel.

Of the seventeen wells belonging to this company, ten, as Mr. Heaton had been informed and Mr. Richardson had said, was current gossip, had been sold to a Mexican government official, but it was evident at first glance that the alleged new owner had not attempted to work them.

In front of the inevitable shack which served as an office for the *Mexican Consolidated*, sat an ancient Mexican with a corrugated face in the shade of a huge sombrero. The latter is the chief part of the clothing equipment of the native and so the rest of his clothes, if such they can be called, and his flat, bare feet doesn’t matter. The boys took him for the watchman.

Bill asked him in *Mex* if the manager or any-

one else who could give them some information, was in. The hangover of an earlier generation grunted, shook his head and became as immobile as a piece of Mexican statuary. Then Jack wanted to know if they might look over the wells. He finally elicited the intelligence from the alternate parallel ridges under the *sombrero* that in order to do so they would have to get a pass signed by some officer of the Company.

After more juggling with the Spanish language in which Jack managed to keep three or four words in the air at the same time, he learned that there was no official of the Company nearer than Mexico City who could sign a pass. Then Jack changed his tactics. He had frequently found that a piece of money was the equivalent of the best pass ever written. He gave a *peso*, that is, a dollar, to the admixture of the Spanish and Aztec races on which the great *sombrero* rested, and explained as he pressed the *iron man* into his palm that they were extremely desirous of taking a look at the wells.

The old Mexican, in the shade of his *sombrero*, fingered the *peso* lovingly and tried his level best to return it to Jack, but at the critical

moment his will power failed him and he put the *peso*, together with his conscience, in his pocket and motioned them to go ahead. Thus doth a little filthy lucre often contaminate the morals of an otherwise perfectly good Mexican. (And sometimes even an American will fall by the wayside when he is likewise tempted.)

The seventeen wells of the *Consolidated* were located roughly in the form of a triangle with the office at the apex nearest the street. The boys stopped under the rigging over the first one. A rough shack had been built at the base of the derrick for the purpose of housing the machinery which pumps the oil from the wells. Curiously enough, the pumping machinery had been removed, but the well had been driven and tubed and it was clear that it had been a producer in its day.

“You see, Bill,” explained Jack, “oil sands which produce in paying quantities may be found anywhere from seventy-five feet to five thousand feet below the surface of the earth, the depth of course depending on where the field is located. The average well is from a thousand eight hundred to three thousand four hundred feet in depth, but I should say from the height

of the derricks, which, with the exception of that one over there, are about seventy feet, that these wells are about twenty-five hundred feet deep.

“For the sake of test purposes wells here, however, have been drilled to much greater depths, the deepest one ever drilled being over seven thousand feet. It may interest you, Bill, to know that after a certain depth is reached in drilling, the temperature of the interior of the earth increases at the rate of about one degree *Fahrenheit* for every ninety-five feet you go down. In a six thousand foot well the temperature has been found to be about 144 degrees *Fahrenheit*. That’s the reason why some oils as they come from the wells are so hot.”

“What’s this *Fair-en-ze-hotter* you high-brows are always spoutin’ about,” inquired Bill, who had heard the word used in connection with temperature but could never quite make out what it had to do with it.

“The *temperature* of a body, that is, its degree of heat, is, as you know, Bill, measured by a *thermometer*. Now, a thermometer must have a scale so that the differences in temperature can be read. The scale we use for all or-

dinary purposes was gotten up by *Fahrenheit*, a German——”

“Then no right thinkin’ American ought to use it,” broke in patriotic Bill.

Jack laughed. “Why *Fahrenheit*’s been dead ever since 1736, so I guess we won’t be contaminated by *Kultur-Kampf* if we look at a *Fahrenheit* thermometer to see how hot or cold it is,” he rejoined.

“But as I was going to say the boiling point on a *Fahrenheit* scale is 212 degrees plus, and the freezing point is 32 degrees plus.”

“I guess I get you,” and Bill blinked his blue eyes blankly.

“In drilling the wells an *oil country outfit* is used, and this consists of one of these derricks, the drilling machinery, and an oil engine, or a steam boiler and engine, to supply the power for operating the latter. The machinery comprises a heavy steel drilling bit, or *spudding bit*, as it is called, and this is attached to one end of the line, or cable, which runs over that *crown pulley* up there on top of the derrick.

“The other end of this long cable is wound on a *cable reel* at the bottom here of the rig. A *jerk line* is attached to the *wrist pin* of the main

driving *crank-shaft* and the other end is fixed to a *spudding shoe* on the cable near the reel. As the crankshaft is turned around by the oil, or steam engine it jerks the cable back and forth and this makes the spudding bit raise up and then lets it drop like a trip hammer.

“As the hole gets deeper, the cable is gradually unwound from the reel, or *bull wheel shaft* as the drillers call it, and this allows the *spudding bit* to be lowered into the well. After the well has been successfully started in this fashion the *jerk-line* is taken off and one end of a *walking beam* is fixed to the wrist pin of the main driving shaft, and a *sand line* is run from another reel up and over that pulley you see there, near the top of the derrick, and down through a hole in the other end of the walking beam; to the end of this line is fixed a *sand* or *mud scow*, as it is called.

“The *spudding bit* is used only for boring through the hard rock formation and when sand is reached the *mud scow* must, of course, be used instead of the *spudding bit*. This *mud scow* is a combined drilling tool and sand pump. Here’s one now. You see, Bill, it is simply a long, narrow bucket in which the sand is

scooped out and when the *scow line* is reeled up, the *mud scow* is hauled to the surface and the sand or mud is dumped out.

“After a well is drilled it must have some kind of a *casing* or *tubing* put in it. Very often it is found necessary to drive the wrought iron pipe, or *tubing*, which is from four and one-half to ten inches in diameter, after the well has been drilled to receive it. Down here in Chihuahua the earth formation has very little rock in it, the formation all the way down from the surface of the earth to the oil bearing stratum being composed chiefly of layers, or *strata*, of clay and quicksand. That’s the reason so many of these drilling rigs have *hydraulic rotary rigs* combined with them.

“The well, after it is drilled, is tubed by means of the *spudding* attachments, and this is done by driving the pipe into the well by *drive clamps* which are made fast to the *bit stem*.”

“I’ve learned something I didn’t know before,” said Bill when Jack had gotten thus far with his explanation of how oil wells are drilled. “If you and me stick together much longer, Jack, I’ll be one of them eddicated guys too, won’t I?”

"You're educated now, Bill, for you know more about useful things than nine-tenths of those *tin-horns* back in New York. What you know is worth everything, especially to me and Uncle Sam, and what they know isn't worth a whoop to themselves or anybody else."

"Gee, I must be some smart guy to get a boost like this," thought Bill. "Go on and tell me some more," he insisted.

"When the drill reaches *pay-sand* the well may *gush* freely of its own accord, that is, oil will be thrown from it like water from an artesian well, or if not it has to be *shot*. By this, I mean that some *nitro-glycerine* or *dynamite* must be detonated in the sand in order to make it flow freely. This explosion shatters and loosens the oil rock and this, in consequence, permits the oil and gas to flow more freely.

"The well is then tubed and the oil and water are pumped to the surface by means of valves in the *working barrel* which is on the lower end of the tubing just as it is in an ordinary well-water pump. These valves are operated by what are known as *sucker rods* and these pass through the tubing to the bottom of the well; the oil and water are *lifted* through the spaces

between the *sucker rods* and the inside of the well tubing.

“The crude oil is pumped into storage tanks and from there it is carried in tank cars to the refiners. The crude oil coming from the wells in Mexico is shipped chiefly to the United States where it is used for fuel principally, but lubricating oils are also obtained from it which are of a very good grade, and it also contains a high percentage of sulphur, salt and wax.

“Now, you see, Bill, although all of these wells have been tubed, there’s no pumping machinery, which goes to show that it has been taken out, though some of them may have been *gushers*. Do you see this valve-cock here?” Jack continued; “if these wells are operative there should be a flow of oil when we turn it on.”

Jack and Bill turned the wheel of the valve on, but to their expectant eyes came no flow of oil.

“That’s funny,” commented Bill, “because Mr. Richardson said these wells were operative.”

“Not funny at all,” retorted Jack in disgust. “That’s just what’s to be expected. These wells have been tampered with in some way so that

no oil can come up through the tubing. Now what I propose is that we come back here to-night and see if we can't remove the tampering with my little blasting outfit. I thought it might come in handy and now we'll have a chance to see what we shall see."

About one o'clock that night, armed with their six-guns and carrying their flash lamps and blasting outfit, the boys crept stealthily around in back of the *Mexican Consolidated* wells and over to the one they had tried out the preceding day. Once inside the rig shack they felt safe and Jack laid out the apparatus by which he hoped to prove the wells to be producers.

The evening before he had cut a hole in the end of a stick of dynamite, with his pocket-knife, large enough to take a priming cap, and connected the latter with a flexible connecting wire, which was at least a thousand feet long. Now under the light of Bill's flash lamp he connected the wire to the magneto. Next he unscrewed one of the cap screws from the casing cap, which latter is screwed on the head of the casing or tubing, and carefully lowered the stick of dynamite down into the tube by the wires.

Finally it came to a stop at what he estimated to be about five hundred feet below the earth's surface. Taking the blasting machine out of the shack and away from the well to a goodly distance, he set it on the ground. Then he suddenly pushed down on the handle of the machine. At the same instant they heard a dull explosion and the boys quickly ran to the well again. To their great delight they saw a thick, black oily liquid spurting up through the hole in the cap on the well tube. The stream of crude oil shot up to a height of ten feet or more and they could see that there was a very considerable pressure back of it.

Jack had discovered the secret of opening the wells of the *Mexican Consolidated*. Quickly Bill screwed the cap-screw back in its place again, but it took all of his strength and skill to do it against the pressure of the oil, and then, not until he was soaked with crude oil from head to foot.

"If me Harlem frien's could only see me now!" he wailed.

"Good boy, Bill," encouraged Jack, and with that they returned to their room well satisfied with their night's work.

CHAPTER VIII

SEÑOR LOPEZ, BANDIT AND PROMOTER.

THE next morning the boy's spirits were as elevated as the proverbial goose, and all because of the successful outcome of their adventure the night before in starting the *Mexican Consolidated* well to flowing, for it proved that Jack's surmises had again been correct. They knew now that to reopen the other wells which the company owned or should own and which Señor Lopez had made inoperative, it would only be necessary to use a little dynamite and *shoot* them as they had done with the one the preceding night.

"What do you think that well was plugged up with," Jack wanted to know.

"Nothin' more, I suppose, than a block of wood," replied Bill; "but it wouldn't surprise me if the force of the explosion ripped out a length of the tubin'. If we have to do it again

we don't want to use more than half-a-stick of dynamite."

"If it was only a wooden plug in the tubing, it would act like a projectile in the barrel of a gun, and simply blow down into the pool," was Jack's idea. "At any rate we know what to do to get oil from the other wells."

There were still several problems confronting Jack—I say Jack, because he usually did the thinking—and while these problems were not such a burden on his mind as the one of producing oil from a well that was supposed to be dead, at the same time he knew that his other propositions would be difficult enough of solution.

The first of these was to find out if the ten wells that were shut down had really been sold to a Mexican official; second, if so, how he could get the *Consolidated* to buy them back again. Aye, here *was* the rub for as the head office of the Company was in Mexico City, it looked to Jack as if he'd have to go on down there and it seemed to him as if this would result in nothing more than a wild goose chase. The third and last problem that confronted him was how to make the Company work the wells when they got

them back and into operative shape. Verily it was a man's job.

Puzzle his brain as he would, Jack could not figure out any reasonable way for doing any of these things. When it came to fighting he felt he could compete with Germans, Mexicans or any other nationality and give a fair account of himself, but he had to admit that what he didn't know about business and bunco-business at that, would fill a book as large as Webster's unabridged dictionary. Further, to complicate matters, he had the alleged Mexican laws to contend with.

He knew it would be of no use to talk these momentous matters over with Bill, for the latter's brain was not one of the caliber that functioned well when it came to working out plots and counter-plots, especially where business matters were involved. True, every once in a while, a clever bit of strategem would flash across the dark recesses of the convoluted mass that occupied his cranium, as, for instance, when he had Jack climb out of the window onto the roof to get the drop on the *Bad Hombre*. On the other hand they were never due to any deep, consecutive thought on his part, but

they came, rather, as though they were prompted by cunning instinct like the spontaneous impulse that is seen in some animals, such as the raccoon. Bill's great forte lay in the fact that he was absolutely unafraid to take punishment of any kind and that his brain, eyes and hands were perfectly coördinated, which made him very expert with his hands, and even better with a gun, whatever its caliber might be.

But Bill was a good listener and, notwithstanding the foregoing characteristics relating to his pal's mind, Jack very often went into details in telling him his ideas and schemes not because he could help out much but to concentrate his own thoughts and bring them to a focus.

In this, Jack was like Abraham Lincoln, as the following incident shows: When Lincoln was President and the Civil War was on he was constantly confronted with staggering problems. At one stage when he was wrestling with a particularly knotty affair, instead of consulting with the members of his cabinet, or talking it over with his close personal advisers, he sent a *wire* to an old friend of his back home at Springfield, Ill., to come to Washington.

This man, so the story goes, was one of very ordinary intelligence, and small learning and when he got Lincoln's message he was surprised beyond measure for he knew that he couldn't be of the slightest help to him. When he reached the White House, Lincoln greeted him heartily and then he began to talk and to pace the floor. After the President had finished his discourse, which lasted upwards of an hour, and during which time his friend had not spoken a word, he bade him good-by. All that Lincoln wanted to do was to *think out loud*. To do this he had to have a good listener, for when thoughts are put into spoken words they crystallize into a very close approximation of something tangible.

In the same way Jack often talked to Bill, but what he was in need of now was helpful advice and so he and Bill went over to the office of *Terrazas Petroleum Company* to see Mr. Richardson.

The big-bodied, whole-souled manager of the *Terrazas* greeted them as cordially as before, but it was clear to the boys that he was laboring under a strain of some kind. Jack told him how he had opened up one of the wells by *shoot-*

ing it with a stick of dynamite the night before, much to Mr. Richardson's astonishment.

"I have never heard of anything quite as daring as that before," he exclaimed, patting Jack on the back; "that's the way to do it, my boy. You'll get along in the world all right for you have the kind of stuff in you that Americans are made of. It is clear that Señor Lopez thought he could fool everybody by plugging up the wells but when he ran up against you boys he *bucked the tiger* once too often. And now, boys, I'll tell you something that will make your eyes bug out," he added, his genial face taking on the serious aspect and set look it had when they came in.

"I'm all ears, Mr. Richardson," said Jack.

"Shoot!" said Bill.

"Late last night I got a *wire* in code from our home office which stated that diplomatic relations might be broken off with Mexico by the United States at any minute. It also contained the information that it was only a matter of a day or so before the United States would send troops into Mexico, and it advised me to rush my men out as quickly as I could and to get out myself. Now, boys, I wouldn't be hold-

ing this job to-day if I had been a quitter and I'm not going to lay down now.

"As soon as I decoded that *wire* I made up my mind that let come what may, I am going to stick right here and protect our property from these *greasers* as long as there's a breath of life in me. I have been out and talked it over with the boys who work here, about fifty all told, and they agreed to a man to stay here with me and put up a fight if they have to.

"The reason, though, that I am telling you this is to warn you to go now. Take my advice and jump on the next north-bound train, which is due in half an hour, and make tracks for El Paso, because when trouble breaks out there is likely to be a general massacre here. With your nerve you may get across the Rio Grande alive!"

"Mr. Richardson, I'm much obliged to you for the advice—more than I can possibly tell you," replied Jack slowly; "but there are several reasons why I can't accept it. First of all, my father's fortune is invested in these wells down here and, the way things stand at present, I've got to stay right here on the ground or else he'll lose it. Second, when we came into this

country, I knew that I was talking my life in my hands. But I've done that same thing before and I came out practically unscathed, so I'm willing to take the chance again.

"Third, I'm a fair shot with a six-gun and with a rifle and I guess if you and your men intend to stick here in the face of the odds against you that I'd kind of like to stay too and help you by doing my bit. And unless I'm very much mistaken that goes for Bill here, too."

"You're shoutin' it does," replied his pal, who was wondering while Jack was talking where he came in. "I never learned much in the six weeks I went to school, Mr. Richardson, but there's two things I always done and that's to treat a pal on the level and the other is never to show a yellow streak. I'm with youse to the limit, see!"

"It is the old spirit of '76 again!" boomed Mr. Richardson, as he grasped the boys' hands one after the other. "That is why the good old U. S. always has been and always will be the greatest nation on earth. That is why Germany couldn't beat us. Boys, I am proud to call you Americans!"

"Since we are going to stay, we might just

as well go right along with the *Consolidated* matter. I came over to ask you, Mr. Richardson, who the manager of the *Consolidated* is and if he is here on the ground or in Mexico City," said Jack.

"He ought to be under the ground," muttered Bill with far more truth than he knew.

"Señor José Lopez is the general manager, as well as the promoter of the *Consolidated*. He is here as a usual thing, but I don't believe he is in town just now, at least I have not seen him for some little time."

"We'll go over and take another look around, anyway."

"All right, boys, but remember that we are on the ragged edge of a row, so watch your step for there is no telling what deviltry these *cholo boys* will be up to now. I have instructed Mack, our engineer, to keep up steam from now on and at the first sign of trouble to blow the big whistle of the plant. That will be a signal for all Americans in this town to rally here armed to the teeth, and *pronto!*"

The boys agreed that they would be right there at the first blast and then they meandered over to the office of the *Mexican Consolidated*

and as the door was open, they casually took a look in. This time they spied some one and so they stepped inside. They were confronted by *el dependiente*, as a clerk is called in Spanish.

"I want to see the manager of this *she-bang*," said Jack bluntly.

"Si, si Señor, step this way if you please," replied the clerk most obligingly, for, know you, that the Mexicans are the politest people in the world when they are not sticking up Americans.

He led the way through a hallway formed of rough lumber and stopped in front of a door on which was painted rudely:

SEÑOR JOSÉ LOPEZ
Manager
PRIVATE

"Your names please?" the sleek little clerk inquired suavely.

"Never mind our names, sonny," blurted out Bill; "just tell Señor Lopez that a couple of old friends of his want to see him."

"Si, si Señor," said the clerk as he held up his left hand wide open to signal them to wait a mo-

ment,—a sign used by all Spanish speaking folks,—and at the same time knocking on the door with his right.

Bill was for pulling some of that rough stuff of his and going right in without being invited but Jack held him back, admonished him to “cut it out and act decent-like.” The door was slightly opened and they heard a confused murmur of voices and shortly the clerk opened it and bade them enter with a courteous bow. They did so with alacrity for fear that Señor Lopez might change his mind. They took in the room, its furnishings and the man who was its sole occupant, at a glance.

To the right of the window, from which seven wells could be seen, was a large mahogany desk, such as you would find in every office in the down town district in New York, but which seemed wholly out of keeping in this shack in the Terrazas oil fields. Other articles of furniture were in keeping with the desk and seated at the latter in a swivel chair with his back toward them was the man they were particularly anxious to see. As the clerk pulled the door shut after him the man at the desk swung round.

“You want to see me?” he asked, looking at them through narrowed eyes. It was then that Jack had the shock of his life, for the man before them was none other than old Lopear, the second-story worker and safe blower of Jack’s Montclair experience and the train dynamitard of the San Blas episode. There sat the identical villain, whose slashed forehead and shorn-off ear showed more prominently than ever now that he had his hat off, looking at them coolly, exactly as if he had never before this moment set eyes upon them.

During his brief struggle with him in Montclair Jack had learned that the fellow was no coward and now he had to give him credit for his coolness. Evidently old Lopear, or, to give him the benefit of his more high-toned name, or alias, as Mr. Richardson had tipped them off, Señor José Lopez, was a man who would stop at nothing to gain his ends. He was certainly a genius in his line which was one of crime. In New York he descended to the depths of a common crook, while here in Mexico he ascended to the pinnacle of a promoter; while in between his various other activities he headed a gang of train dynamitards.

"I guess we know each other pretty well by this time, Lopez," said Jack, looking him straight in the eye, and so we won't need any introduction."

"On the contrary," replied this amazing scoundrel, "I cannot recollect of our ever having met before and you have the advantage of me in knowing my name."

Bill was all attention for it looked to him as if he was standing face to face with *Old Sleuth Adventure*, and he wanted to be sure that he didn't let the old romancer get away. But adventure is the strangest bedfellow in the world, for the harder you look for it the less likely you are to find it and when you expect it the least that is when it suddenly looms up before you and invites your attention. If then you keep your wits about you and follow where it leads, you will see a phase of the world that is reserved for the favored few, but if you have to think twice, what would have been an adventure changes into a mere commonplace.

Señor Lopez shook his head as one who was striving to remember, but what he was really doing was trying to forget. Bill had an idea of hurrying up old *Adventure* by the use of his

six-gun, but as yet there was nothing to warrant it.

“Then perhaps the mention of a person who calls himself the *Bad Hombre of Chilili* may serve to refresh your mind,” persisted Jack, who was determined to make the fellow admit that he knew them.

Again Señor Lopez shook his head. “I am very poor at remembering names and faces,” he smiled deprecatingly.

“Then maybe you can remember events better,” continued Jack with downright Yankee perseverance; “do you recall a certain passenger train that was blown up near San Blas three nights ago?”

“I may have read about it in the paper but there are so many trains dynamited in Mexico at the present time it would be hard, I imagine, for one to keep them all in mind.”

“Right-o,” grunted Bill.

“This irrelevant talk has gone far enough. Now will you be good enough to give me your names and state your business. As you can see”—he pointed to a pile of letters on his desk—“I am a busy man.”

Jack was dumfounded at the fellow's show

of assurance. Could it be that there were two men who bore identical disfiguring marks on their heads, one of whom was in the States and the other in Mexico? It was possible but not probable. Not once had the wily *greaser* batted an eye at the mention of his crimes but, at that, those that Jack knew about may have been merely minor ones which he had in consequence entirely forgotten.

As you well know I am Jack Heaton, son of Mr. Heaton who owns a hundred thousand dollars worth of stock in the *Consolidated*. This is my partner, Mr. Adams."

"Will you be seated, young gentlemen?" politely inquired Señor Lopez, drawing up a couple of chairs.

"Thanks," said Jack coldly, "but I guess we had better transact our business standing. Now to get down to cases, you people claim that the oil supply of your wells is exhausted and that for this reason you sold ten of them to some Mexican official; then you offered to buy back my father's stock at a dead loss to him of ninety thousand dollars.

"Failing in this, you personally went to Montclair, broke into our house in the dead

of night, blew open the safe and all but got away with his certificates. Just as luck would have it, I happened to be at home and balked you in that crime. Escaping from the police you have repeatedly tried to kill me and my partner here, to keep us from reaching Terrazas.

“Now that we’re here, Lopear—Lopez, I mean—there’s no use in your trying to pull this stuff that we’re strangers to you. What’s more, I know for a positive fact that the wells of the *Mexican Consolidated* are O. K. in every respect, and that the sale or transfer of those ten wells was illegal and done to defraud the American stockholders. Now what I want to know is what you intend to do about it?”

“Yes, that’s what we want to know,” Bill backed him up.

During this accusation Jack could see that however sure Señor Lopez might feel of his ground he did not relish the things that were being said to and about him. At other times and places he would have made answer with his knife, but not here at Terrazas, where he was well known to everybody in town and always posed as a high-toned and legitimate promoter.

“I say, what are you going to do about it?” Jack vociferously reiterated.

“Nothing!” replied Lopez, bringing his fist down on his desk with a thump that made the papers jump. “In the first place you come into my office and insult me and in the second place you make statements that are absolutely false. I have never seen either of you before and I could have you sent to prison for the slanderous statements you have made. The officers of the *Consolidated* sold the ten wells because the oil source is exhausted—exhausted, I tell you!”

“Hold on a minute there,” cried Jack, “how do you account for the fact that the Chihuahua wells and the Terrazas wells are producers while yours are not. You know and I know that all three of the companies are drawing from the same pool.”

“Who told you that?” Lopez demanded.

“Mr. Richardson, of the *Terrazas Company*,” Jack replied.

“Then Señor Richardson is either misinformed or else he wilfully lies!” fairly yelled Lopez. “Our wells are drawing from an entirely separate and distinct pool, I tell you, and that pool was exhausted over two months

ago. Now get out; I haven't any more time to fool away on Americano boys like you!"

"When I go," returned Jack, in a voice that carried conviction with it, "you've got to go with me and show me that the wells are dead before I'll be convinced."

"Yes, you've got to show us; we're from Missouri, we are," chipped in Bill.

"All right, I'll go with you if only to get rid of you"—Señor Lopez put on his *panama*, pulled it down on the side of his head so that it covered up the place where the top of his ear ought to have been, and the trio started for the wells.

When they were outside the shack the ire of Señor Lopez subsided and he again assumed an air of cool confidence.

"What well do you prefer to be convinced at," he asked nonchalantly.

"Oh, that one over there will do," answered Jack, just as indifferently, pointing to the one he had *shot* the night before.

Once inside the rig-shack Lopez stopped.

"Do you see that valve there," he asked sneeringly, and as it had a six-inch wheel handle on it the boys had to admit they did.

“When the well was a gusher and I turned on that valve, the oil flowed in a constant stream from the pipe connected with it. Now when I turn on the valve there will be no flow of oil, because, as I have patiently explained to you before, the oil pool has been exhausted.

With that he gripped the valve wheel and gave it a few turns counterclockwise. From the end of the pipe which projected into the reservoir tank came a gush of crude-oil that could not have failed to convince anyone but a man who could not see that the well was a live one.

“Sancho Pancho!” bawled out Señor Lopez, or words even worse than these, astounded at the unexpected turn of affairs.

“You see, Lopez, I knew what I was talking about,” said Jack quietly; “and now I don’t mind letting you in on a little secret. Last night my partner here and I came over and after prospecting around we *shot* this well on our own account. You see, we knew how and where to strike oil when you, the manager of the *Consolidated*, didn’t know.”

“Carranza!” howled Lopez.

“Go ahead and take old Carranza’s name in vain, I don’t care,” laughed Jack.

“You gringo dogs have crossed me once too often. For this dirty piece of business you shall suffer. You have tampered with the property of the Mexican Government and you shall rot in jail for it. I am going for the police now.”

It looked to Jack as if the Montclair tables would be turned and that down here in Terrazas, Lopez would have the pleasure of seeing the handcuffs on him. He didn't like the idea worth a cent.

Bill had listened to about all that he could stand for and so he jumped in and took a hand. Jamming the muzzle of his revolver into the digestive anatomy of the yeggman-manager-promoter he backed him out of the door of the shack.

“Look here, you half-baked, yellow livered murderin' *greaser*. One more threat out of you and I'll pump so much lead into you your stomach will think you've swallowed a storage battery. What's more, you ain't goin' to tell the cops nothin' because me and my pal here has got enough on you to hang you. Now git.” And with that he started Señor Lopez down the path toward the street. That worthy moved

right along, *pronto*, with never a backward look.

“I’m afraid you’ve gone and done it,” said Jack.

“Never you worry, Buddy,” Bill replied in his own defense; “that *greaser* may go and have us pinched now on general principles, but he’d have done it anyway so what’s the diff?”

“Well, if it comes to a point where they’re going to arrest us, we’ll put up a fight rather than submit, because, as old Lopear said,—and he spoke the truth for once in his life,—we’d simply rot in jail waiting for Mexican justice. I’d prefer to rot in six feet of earth.”

“You’re right, Jack. When a *greaser* starts to talk about gettin’ the law down on you, why it’s time, I says, to get your arsenal ready for action.”

CHAPTER IX

“REMEMBER THE ALAMO!”

THERE was more excitement in Terrazas that evening than there had been since the memorable day when oil had been struck several years before. But now it was of a different kind. Then there was wild joy among the populace, great feasts and much drinking, music and dancing, games, a bull-fight, and, to cap the climax, a blazing gusher illuminated the night's revelries by a crimson column of flame that shot up high in the air.

Then, Americans had drilled for and discovered the oil that was to make Chihuahua the richest province in northern Mexico. Naturally the Americano was the Mexican's best friend and the latter swore eternal allegiance to his white benefactor. But no one can forget a kindness quicker than a Mexican, or remember a real or fancied wrong longer. They had long since lost sight of the fact that peon and

promoter alike had prospered only because of the initiative, energy and ability of the hardy men from the States who had brought their drilling rigs into these parts, with the sanction and under the protection of the Mexican Government and made the earth cough up its priceless treasure of oil. Their one thought now was to freeze out the pioneers who had discovered and financed the Terrazas oil fields, and hog it all.

To this end they had been working for months and had employed such open and excessive violence against the Americans in Mexico, and occasionally in the border States, that Uncle Sam had entirely lost his patience and was even at that moment ready to cross the border, and straighten his crooked neighbor up a bit by force of arms if necessary.

It was clear that the Mexicans of Terrazas had heard the news of the approaching action of the United States not long after Mr. Richardson received it, and that it had spread like wildfire all through the oil camp and the surrounding country. Crowds of frenzied Mexicans thronged the main street and above the noise and din could be heard the yells of "*down*

with the Americanos!" That there was a particularly tough element in town ready to wipe out the few Americans was evidenced by the fact that even the women and girls were armed with clubs, knives, revolvers and rifles.

Most of the American contingent had already gone over to the Terrazas plant as they knew it was safer to get under Mr. Richardson's protection as speedily as possible rather than to wait until the whistle blew. Whenever any one was seen on the streets he was hissed and hooted at by the excited and enraged Mexicans and there were some attempts at gun-play but no one was hurt. To all intents it was a mob but yet it was clear that it was held in check by some power behind it—some leader in authority.

An oil camp, like Terrazas, full of armed and maddened Mexicans is not a pleasing sight at any time and one which once seen could never be forgotten, for they presented a far more diabolical appearance than a band of renegade Apaches on the war-path. Much as the natives hated the Americans they feared them to some extent as well, because it had been their experience that when once attacked the Yan-

kees would put up a desperate fight. Further, it mystified their simple minds why steam was kept up at the Terrazas plant and when an ignorant person can't understand the how and why of a thing he is usually afraid of it.

Thus while the crowd made no concerted effort to do actual bodily harm to the Americans as yet, their threatening manner showed what was to be expected of it if a spark were touched to the tinder. Like a few of the more adventurous Americans in Terrazas, Jack and Bill intended to stay at the hotel until the whistle blew for, as Bill said, the proprietor had made them pay in advance and they had to stay to get their money's worth. They prepared for the night by buckling on their cartridge belts, their rifles at hand and their six-guns loose in their holsters. And so it was that they fell asleep with the hoarse shouts and wild cries of the *greasers* ringing in their ears.

Past all belief they were not molested during the night and when they awoke from their fitful slumbers the first sounds to greet their ears were the confused yells of the rabble, though they were far less intense than the evening before. When daylight came, a glance out of their

shuttered window showed the same surging mass of humanity, a little more tired and a little less energetic than they were when they had started out, and with the rising sun came the glint of its rays reflected from the steel of many weapons.

They concluded they would not need any breakfast and after reconnoitering to make sure they were not being ambushed or hemmed in by an armed force they made their way out in safety. Steering clear of the main street, they followed the more unfrequented back streets that led to the rear of the *Terrazas Company's* plant. They were getting along famously and, doubtless, would have been highly successful in reaching this point of vantage without let or hindrance, had it not been for a lone *greaser* who staggered out of the rear door of a *mescal* shop into the narrow street.

Spotting the boys with his bleary eyes, he stopped them and began to heap abuse upon them in fluent Spanish but without the lisping pronunciation which characterizes the native-born of Hispania. In other words he was a born *greaser*. At the same time he promiscuously flourished his revolver in the air and

by way of emphasis he occasionally fired it. The boys tried to pass on but he wouldn't let them and it soon became clear that they would have to take the whip-hand or he would do them up.

"Here you, put up that gun, or you'll hurt yourself with it!" growled Bill, who was now thoroughly peeved.

By way of an answer the *greaser* pulled the trigger and a bullet whizzed perilously close to Bill's ear.

"I'll be another one of those earless rabbits like old Lopear if this guy keeps on much longer," he added.

"Well, give it to him then," said Jack in English.

True to his early training in the lots back of the gas-house, Bill did the thing that always came perfectly natural to him when he was opposed by physical man power. He caught the *greaser* square on the jaw with a straight arm jab that had the kick of a mule back of it. Mr. Abusive and Gun-Playing Mex then performed a series of curious evolutions which invariably follow the correct delivery of this blow. Both of his heavy-booted and spurred feet left the

ground and followed his head into space like a skyrocket—though he did not go quite as high; his revolver flew one way and his sombrero the other, then he fell and in the twinkling of an eye his head was resting on the identical spot where his feet had stood.

Bill's experience had taught him that the *greaser* would be a sick man for the rest of the day and that his chances for disturbing the peace were practically zero. Without waiting for any one else to block their progress, the boys stepped over the prostrate form and hurried on to the *Terrazas* plant, the office of which they reached without further incident. There they found Mr. Richardson, his men and a few other Americans who had gathered together and were talking over ways and means to meet the impending trouble. The manager greeted them warmly.

"Hello, boys; I was beginning to think they had gotten you," he said.

"One of them almost got us," replied Jack, "but the battle was short; only two blows were struck, the first when Bill struck the *greaser* and the other when the *greaser* struck the ground."

Bill grinned and the others laughed.

"You should have stayed here with us last night by all means. I had no idea the natives would turn out so quickly. Well, we are mighty glad you are with us now. What luck did you fellows have with our friend Señor Lopez yesterday? I saw him walking up the street looking pretty glum and I presumed you had interviewed him."

"We did, but to no purpose," replied Jack dejectedly. "He pretended he had never seen us before and simply refused to do anything about the wells. And when we showed him there was oil a-plenty and told him how we had shot the well, he promptly flew off of the handle and threatened to have us arrested for tampering with what he called 'government property.' "

"Cheer up, Jack," said Mr. Richardson, calling the young oil prospector by his given name for the first time. This man and this boy had not known each other for more than twenty-four hours but now that they were in the face of grave danger there was a deep mutual feeling between them and it seemed to each that he had known the other always.

The manager didn't take as kindly to Bill, for even in a rough country like this he seemed a trifle too crude. But it wasn't Bill's fault, for no one was more anxious than he to talk right and to do right. He was of a verity like crude oil in that he was the resultant stuff of all manner of substances and his parentage, the early loss of his father, his environment and his battle with poverty had left him very much the same as when nature had laid him down in one of the hardest and most awfully smelly spots then known in New York, not even barring the Five Points and Hell's Kitchen.

Had he been refined by the same process of factional distillation that crude oils and Montclair boys are subjected to he would have stood up just as well under all the various tests by which these quite different products are standardized. Bill was a fellow that you had to know to the core to be able to really like. Jack knew him for what he was.

“As I was about to say,” went on Mr. Richardson, “the reason that Señor Lopez was so infernally independent was because he, too, probably knew that intervention would soon be coming and that then he would be held ac-

countable for nothing. The thing, though, that none of these *greasers* seem to realize is that some day we may do more than we are planning now, and that then there will be many things they will be held accountable for. They have been anxiously waiting all night for news of our government's action and the fools will be glad when it comes for the love of killing is born in them. When——”

Mr. Richardson did not finish what he intended to say for at that instant the crowd around the telegraph office gave vent to a loud outburst of cheering and sombreros and bullets went flying through the air in their wild enthusiasm. Came three vociferous shouts through the window, shouts that were easily translated into “Death to the gringos! Long live Mexico!”

Their cry carried far and Mack, the engineer at the power house, pulled down hard on the cord of the big work whistle and its bellowing blast drowned out all the other sounds made by human throats for the time being. At the first warning signal of the whistle the few Americans remaining outside of the Terrazas plant made their circuitous way toward it as speedily

as they could and the crack of revolvers and of rifles told the boys that skirmishes were already under way between the Americans and the Mexicans. Within ten minutes every American in town was accounted for by Mr. Richardson and he bolted the doors of the office. He saw to it that every mother's son of them had his rifle, revolvers and a full quota of ammunition.

He snatched up his own rifle and then shouted, "All right boys, follow me."

Mr. Richardson led the little company into the next room; there he kicked aside a rug and this disclosed to view a large trap door that set flush in the floor. With the help of one of his men he lifted it up and the boys discovered that it opened into a shallow tunnel about three feet wide and four feet deep.

One by one the men followed the manager and dropped into the tunnel. He and some of his men carried flash-lights and they made their way at a rapid pace through the underground passage although it was necessary for them to walk with their backs bent almost double in order to keep from striking the roof of it. Mack and a couple of his firemen brought up in the

rear and as they were the last to go through the trap door they bolted it down after them.

After the manager had led the way for the length of a city block, or so it seemed to Jack, in this awkward and tiresome fashion, the tunnel came to an abrupt end. Mr. Richardson stopped and stood nearly erect now, for there was more headroom above him, and here another trap door was exposed to view. Putting his big shoulder against it he forced it up and with the aid of Jack and Bill who used their guns as levers, the door opened easily since it was balanced, or nearly so, by a weight above. The manager nimbly raised himself through the opening to the upper floor and then he gave each of the boys a hand and they in turn helped the others behind them. All were soon through and Mack and his men bolted down the door.

The boys found they were in a large room and the only light which penetrated it came through narrow slits a couple of feet higher than a man's head and these were equally spaced in the surrounding walls. Along the bottom of the walls ran a broad step so that a dozen men could stand on it and fire out of the loopholes above, for such the openings were.

The walls of this fortalice were made of 'dobe and easily ten feet thick, while in the center of it was a gigantic steel tank.

“This place, boys, was built by our *Company* to protect our reservoir tanks in just such a mob crisis as we are now facing. Fortunately for us we have not been pumping oil for the past month or so and as the tank is empty luck is with us,” explained Mr. Richardson.

“As you will see, if you look out of the loopholes, this building is placed in the exact center of a circle on whose circumference our wells set. From the loopholes every well can be plainly seen and at the same time we can protect any one or all of them should it be necessary for us to do so.

“This ladder you see here leads up to the roof and in case we are driven from our position here we can make a last stand there. Now then for the sake of teamwork we have got to choose a leader that all of you men have confidence in and one you will obey implicitly. Who shall it be?”

As with a single voice the men shouted, “Richardson!”

To show his appreciation the oil plant man-

ager smiled his big, genial smile and said simply, "All right, men. Thanks."

Then to his own men he explained that Jack and Bill, although "mere kids" as he called them, had been through the great World War and had seen actual fighting service. That they had ridden from Juarez in saddles and had successfully fought off bandits, thirst and everything for which Mexico is noted.

"Three cheers for Jack Heaton and Bill Adams!" came ringing from the men's throats, and they were unanimously named as Captain Richardson's lieutenants.

Although our government was not planning war but merely a punitive expedition, a miniature war existed in Terrazas.

The men were split up into two sections, Jack being in command of one and Bill of the other. They were then assigned to posts at the loopholes so that all four sides of the 'dobe were protected. Half a dozen men who were crack-shots were picked out for sniper's duty on the roof, while four more men were detailed to look after the wounded, should there be any, and two more volunteered for cook's duty, for if, as Napoleon said, an army marches on its stomach,

it is none the less true that it fights on its stomach.

Scarcely had these preparations for siege been completed when one of the snipers on the roof shouted down that the Mexicans had been mobilized and were getting ready to attack the office shack of the *Terrazas Company* which Captain Richardson and his men had just left.

“So much the better for us,” said the leader. “There will be just that much more powder wasted by the *greasers*.”

About half of the attacking party took up a position in front of the office and the remainder fell back to one side of the rear of it. Then a volley was fired through the front wall of the shack.

“The dubs think we’re in there and are goin’ to break our necks to get out of the back door,” yawned Bill; “wonder what they take us for—a lot of wooden Indians?”

Since none of the Americans made their exit through the rear door to be shot down like dogs, as the leader of the Mexicans figured they would, the *greasers* fired volley after volley through the shack, firmly believing that the Americans were still in it. Hearing no cries,

they battered in the door and made a grand rush to see who could get in first, but they were doomed to disappointment.

Whoever the genius was that designed the *Terrazas Company's* plant, he had put one over on the Mexicans, for the tunnel was a bit of engineering that no one except Captain Richardson and two or three of his most trusted men knew the existence of.

"I've made a big fizzle of it," Jack said to Captain Richardson.

"How so?"

"What I should have done was to have planted a couple of sticks of dynamite in the office before we left, led the wires over here and connected them with my blasting machine. We could have blown them to—smithereens."

"A good idea, Jack, but too late for execution in both senses. We will have to fight it out right here."

The Mexicans did not stay long around the office after they found the Americans were not there. Finding their quarry gone, they acted more like a drove of wild steers than a body of soldiers, but they did have a leader and they followed him. Even at that distance their leader,

a small but rather heavy set *greaser*, was recognized by Jack and Bill as the notorious Lope-ear, or Lopez. They saw him point toward their '*dobe* stronghold and with a hoarse yell the mob came forward pell-mell, brandishing knives, revolvers and all manner of arms as they came on at a dead run.

Soon the dull thud of bullets flattening against the outside of the thick walls could be heard like hail falling on a tiled roof. So far the defenders of the '*dobe* post had not fired a shot. Under this rain of gunfire, aimless as it was, some of the men began to grow a little restless, for while they were skilled in the use of oil rigs, the business of warfare was out of their line. Captain Richardson walked up and down the lines with his tense, curt words of advice which inspired confidence.

"Steady, men!" he cried, "let Lopez' men waste all the lead they have a mind to. Wait until you can see the whites of their eyes and then let them have it."

The *greasers* under Lopez advanced steadily on the '*dobe* until they were within twenty yards of it. Then from the loopholes on two sides there simultaneously blazed forth a solid

sheet of flame and the oncoming ranks were reduced by at least fifty men. Under the demoralizing fire of the Americans, in spite of the superior numbers of the Mexicans, the latter might have been expected to break, and break they did, each and every coyote of them seeking the scant protection offered by the loose building materials which lay scattered around. At the command of Lopez they rallied and then *deployed*, that is, they spread out in a line which extended to the rear of the '*dobe*. No sooner had they executed this maneuver than they were met by another raking fire, and again they broke and sought such scant shelter as they could find.

The fire of the Mexicans had not, however, been entirely without effect, for inside of the '*dobe* half-a-dozen defenders had either fallen mortally wounded or else were too badly hurt to carry on by bullets which had passed through the loopholes. But so far they had nothing to complain of and they felt their position was almost impregnable.

Throughout the long afternoon the Mexicans kept up a desultory firing which the Americans

returned with cold lead, aimed straight and calculated to kill.

Toward evening Lopez' reduced force withdrew and Jack ran up on the roof to survey its position. As he looked around through a pair of binoculars, which Captain Richardson had handed him, whenever he leveled them in the direction of the German-owned wells he could see half-a-dozen fine parallel lines, but it was some time before he could make out what they were.

The Germans had two oil drilling rigs whose derricks were higher by fifty feet than any of the others at Terrazas and they were located about three hundred feet apart. In following up these lines in the glass he observed that they came to an end at the extreme top of each derrick.

"That settles it!" he thought; "it's a wireless aerial and wherever you find an aerial there you'll find a sending and receiving apparatus hooked up to it."

"Know anything about that wireless station over there?" he asked one of the sharpshooters on the roof.

"I know all about it," the rifle-wizard replied; "it's one of the most powerful stations

in Mexico. It was put up during the Great War and was used as a signaling station between secret stations in the United States and German submarines."

"Is it in working order now?" further questioned Jack.

"Guess so," replied his informant; "at least it was a week ago."

Jack scuttled down the ladder as fast as his legs would carry him and sought out Captain Richardson.

"Captain, can I have six men?" he asked anxiously. "I've just discovered that there's a big German wireless station over at the Chihuahua wells. Now if I can get over there I can put a message through to El Paso and maybe we can get help. I'm an old wireless operator, you know."

"You're welcome to try it, my boy, but I doubt if you can get through their lines."

"I've been noticing all afternoon that there's been very little fire from the west side of the building and this evening it ceased altogether. I believe the Mexicans are withdrawing from that side and that they intend to attack us in force on the north side to-night.

“Now what I propose is that, with a detail of six men, I will lower myself from the roof to the ground as soon as it is dark and try to reach the station. In the meantime you can inform your sharpshooters of my plan and they can cover our retreat in case we have to return.”

As luck would have it, Jack and his detail were not discovered when they made their bold sortie that evening but they succeeded in reaching the wireless station only because their young lieutenant used all the craft of the trained soldier and the cunning of the Indian scout.

When they got alongside the concrete building that housed the transmitting and the receiving apparatus Jack could see that there was not much business going on, for a solitary operator had on a pair of head-phones and was working the key. Through the open window came the sizzling sounds of the quenched sparks between the disk electrodes as the high tension circuit was made and broken up into dots and dashes.

What the operator was sending was beyond Jack's ability to read, though the letters of the alphabet were clearly in *International Morse*.

At first he thought that the message was going out *in code*, but then it occurred to him that since this was a German station the message was being sent in the horrible jargon which the Germans use for a language.

Grasping his revolver by the muzzle Jack tapped softly on the door. The operator removed his head-phones, got up and opened the door, evidently expecting a friend. But what happened next he was never able to get quite clear in his mind, for Jack brought the heavy wooden grips of his pistol down on the fellow's blond head with a resounding whack which indicated all too plainly that there was *nobody home*. He dropped in a heap on the floor.

From his little light colored mustache carefully upturned at the points in burlesque imitation of Mr. William Hohenzollern, it was plain that he was a German through and through. While his men trussed him up, Jack sent out the following message time and time again:

“Terrazas, Chihuahua. Fifty Americans besieged by Mexican mob. Can hold out until morning. Send help.

“CAPTAIN RICHARDSON.”

Then he put on the head-phones and listened in and he was rewarded by a series of high-pitched buzzes which was the call letter of the American government station at El Paso. To the surprise and great joy of himself and his men he read:

"Will notify cavalry at Corralitos and order them to proceed at once to your relief. Hang on; help coming. Headquarters, Fort Bliss, Tex.

"COL. WHEELER, Commanding."

"Some kid, that Jack Heaton," one of the well drillers said to the others of the detail.

"He blew into this camp in the nick of time," remarked another. And so on and so on until each one had accorded him a word of praise.

"Now let's get back to the *'dobe* as fast as we can and deliver the news to Captain Richardson," said Jack quietly.

Pursuing the same tactics they had used in making their way over to the station, which Jack had learned while he was at the front in France, they stealthily crept back and on reaching it were quickly hoisted up to the roof.

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Jack had not taken the time to write the message down but gave it to Captain Richardson by word of mouth.

"Bully! greatest piece of business I ever heard of!" ejaculated his superior officer.

"Jack put 'er there! I'll hold your hawse for youse anytime," was the way Bill expressed his admiration for his pal.

Captain Richardson called all of his men around him and told them what Jack had done, with the result that a small army was even then on its way to relieve them. The men simply went wild and no Mexican army that ever lived could have had any effect on them now. Their morale was raised sky-high.

Scarcely had they received the news when a loud explosion within the *'dobe* sent the mortar flying in every direction. The Mexicans had discovered the tunnel and the trap door leading into the *'dobe* and had dynamited it. A part of one of the thick walls was blown away and in an instant the place was laid open to attack.

"To the roof, men!" shouted Captain Richardson. With a bound the defenders mounted

to the roof, drawing their ladders up after them. Quickly ladders were placed against the sides of the *'dobe* by the besiegers as soon as they had discovered that the Americans had taken to the roof. Time and again they were picked off by the sharp-shooters and Bill won Captain Richardson's eternal friendship and whole-souled approval by the unfailing accuracy with which he made every bullet topple off a Mexican.

“Bill, you're a wonder!” he said.

“Thank you, sir,” replied Bill without stopping between shots.

But there was no use; the Mexicans had the advantage of outnumbering them a hundred to one and more and more of them reached the roof.

Then was heard that memorable cry which never yet has failed to strike terror into the heart of the Mexican.

“Remember the Alamo!” came Jack's ringing voice.

The cry was caught up by a score of throats and gave the men renewed courage and energy. They fought like tigers. Revolvers were fired

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at point blank range with terrific effect and clubbed rifles smashed Mexican skulls like eggshells. In less than one minute after Jack had given the cry, the roof was cleared of *greasers*.

CHAPTER X

WITH UNCLE SAM IN MEXICO

THIRTY miles away at Corralitos, American cavalry and artillery went into camp on that ever to be remembered evening when the little handful of Americans at Terrazas were waging a defense against the Mexicans, second only in history to that of the Alamo.

Eighty-three years it has been since the old Texan fort of Alamo de Bexar, at San Antonio, was defended by a few Americans when it was attacked by a force of eight thousand Mexicans under Santa Anna, who was then the President of Mexico. The defenders put up a heroic fight but they were crushed by the superior forces of the enemy and slaughtered with great cruelty.

Among their number were such noted frontiersmen and fighters as Davy Crockett, the great hunter of beasts and men, and Jim Bowie, inventor of the famous bowieknife. At the

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time of the attack, Bowie was confined to his bed in one of the rooms with consumption; when the Mexicans finally gained entrance to the fort they burst in upon Bowie who sat propped up in bed with six rifles across his knees; snatching up one rifle after another he fired them with deadly aim, killing six of the oncoming Mexicans. He then drew the long, keen hunting knife that he had invented and, although mortally wounded by bayonet thrusts, he killed as many more before he died. Thus it was that one sick American accounted for a dozen *greasers*.

The defenders of the Alamo fought and died to a man, though it is said that there was one who escaped. Shortly after the massacre, General Sam Houston with a small army arrived on the scene of action but it was too late. The next month, though, at San Jacinto, he annihilated Santa Anna's army and so avenged the brave defenders of the Alamo. Texas then became an independent nation and later it was admitted as a state of the American Union.

It looked very much as if the oil tank garrison at Terrazas was to be another Alamo. But there was this difference: wireless telegraphy

and air-planes had been invented, and while it had been possible for the Terrazas defenders to get in touch with the small army at Corralitos through the high-power station at El Paso, the fighters of the Alamo had no means of communicating with General Houston's army.

The camp of the American Army was located about a mile outside of the dozing little town of Corralitos. There was something so peaceful and satisfying in the semitropical air, it seemed quite impossible that guerilla warfare was again in progress and to the soldier boys, who now and then caught the savory odors, as the cooks were preparing the evening *chow*, life seemed too good to be true. Any observer though, with half-an-eye, could have seen that underlying it all was a current of tense and watchful waiting from the officers down to the buck-privates as they moved with silence and precision about their duties.

In the artillery the radio details had their aerials up and their instruments connected in readiness for instant action. The field pieces had been quickly mounted in temporary positions for defense and in the caissons lined up

beside them row after row of glistening 75's were visible.

The cavalrymen, with their horses picketed and being fed and saddle equipment three paces to the rear, ate their *chow* sitting on their saddles as is their wont, for these make first-rate seats when on the ground—ready at a moment's notice to saddle and mount.

In the center of this scene of preparedness were the headquarters' tents. One after another troop-captains, battery commanders and orderlies dashed up to and from headquarters, carrying with them the carefully planned instructions of the commanding officer who sat inside.

On the outskirts of the big camp mounted sentries rode their posts in true military fashion, to wit, keeping always on the alert and observing everything that took place within sight and hearing. As dusk closed in on the camp the brisk and cheery notes of the bugles and the crisp and curt challenges of the sentries as they cried, "halt, who's there?" gave an even more martial aspect to the bivouac, if such a thing were possible.

About nine o'clock that evening, while the ra-

dio-operators of the various details sat with their head-phones glued to their ears, Henkley, attached to D battery, picked up the following message:

BTN; BTN; BTN; Handful of Americans Terrazas besieged by mob. Rush aid. By order Headquarters. U. S. A. Fort Bliss, Wheeler Commanding.

Jack's message from the high power German station at Terrazas had been caught by the operator of the American station at Fort Bliss just outside of El Paso and he had sent it back to the commander of the 11th Brigade at Corralitos. Curiously enough the operators of the 11th Brigade could not receive the message from the German station since it used an enormously long wave length, while theirs was of very short length. Fortunately it was picked up by the high-power station at Fort Bliss, who then relayed it.

The captain's orderly from D battery dashed over to headquarters with the message. Admitted to the tent, he entered with his hat on, which a soldier always does when he is

armed, took a smart step forward, clicked his heels together and at the same time saluted.

“Sir, Captain Brown, 15th Field Artillery, D Battery, reports this message received by radio,” and handing the Brigadier-General the message he again clicked his heels and saluting smartly did a neat about face and departed.

Less than five minutes later the bugles sounded the call to horse and in fifteen minutes the camp was broken and the long line of cavalry and artillery was off for Terrazas on the fast trot. The cries of the drivers sounding through the still night air as the column followed the narrow circuitous trail, blended strangely well with the rattle of the wheels, the groaning of the pieces and the clickety-thud of the horses' hoofs.

From the cavalry came the jingle and click of the sabers against stirrups and these musical sounds mingled again with the snorting and whinnying of the spirited horses. And finally an airplane darted forth and circled in every direction for miles to make sure that the enemy was not stealthily waiting in some concealed position ready to make a surprise attack upon them. Hour after hour all through the night

the American forces pushed on, leaving mile after mile behind them and Terrazas grew nearer and nearer.

As the pale stars above them and the bowl-like crescent of the moon in the western sky were giving way to the purple light of the early morning, the column came within sight of the town and the distant sound of rifle and pistol fire was carried to the ears of the eager boys in khaki. They became more alert, notwithstanding their long ride, and even the horses appeared to sense the need of speed for they pressed forward ever faster and faster.

A mile and a half from Terrazas, the artillery halted and drew up into position with every piece trained on the town. The airplane made directly for Terrazas and circled round it. Inside of two minutes it was back again and was signaling to the radio-details. D battery radio-detail, which was always the first to tune in, caught the message:

“Americans putting up desperate fight on roof of *'dobe* tank station. Mexicans number five thousand. Inform cavalry. Withhold fire.”

A hard riding orderly caught up to the cavalry column before it had gone very far and imparted the news to the Major in command.

The little band on top of the '*dobe* garrison was hard hit and the fallen outnumbered the survivors, two to one. Gradually one by one the infuriated Mexicans reached the roof of the '*dobe* in spite of the superb marksmanship of the defenders. Like so many swarthy pirates boarding a treasure ship they fairly swarmed up the ladders and as fast as one *greaser* was shot or beaten off, fifty more surged forward to take his place.

The Americans were bravely keeping up a steady fire and the barrels of their Winchesters grew blistering hot to the touch. Over the '*dobe* hung a haze of smoke from the incessant fire and the rank and stifling odor of burnt powder permeated the air like the fumes of a poison gas. As soon as a Mexican had forced his way over the parapet surrounding the roof one of the defenders would rush forward and a hand to hand encounter would ensue, fought silently, but with all the ferociousness that the puma displays when driven into a corner.

After an exchange of shots on both sides, Yankee and *greaser* would close in and come to death grips. In this close fighting the *greaser's* invariable weapon was the long knife. For most of the men the only defense against this butcher's tool was the clubbed revolver, but there were among the Americans some half-a-dozen cow punchers, who had learned the trick and like the defenders of the Alamo these met knife with knife.

Would come a lighting like-lunge, a skillful parry and then with locked blades the principals of this knife duel to the death would stand like statues, their muscles bulging, neither daring to make the first move to break the dangerous deadlock. Suddenly with a gliding step the duelists would move to and fro, or around in circles with the litheness of panthers in the act of bringing down their prey. And soon the end would come for one or the other, when the death dueling couple collided with another pair who were similarly engaged.

And so it was that for a time the *greasers* who managed to gain the roof were speedily dispatched until not a single one remained. During this interval the Mexicans were gather-

ing for a fresh assault and Captain Richardson, seeing the uselessness of the struggle, called the few survivors together. Very different he looked now from the trim, jovial man who had taken command the morning before.

"Boys," he said wearily, his bloody shirt hanging in rags from his shoulders and one arm dangling limply by his side, "we have put up a good fight as true Americans should, but we are outnumbered a hundred to one. We have no more water and our ammunition is gone. You fellows have stuck by me splendidly and I thank you. If there are any among you who want to surrender you can do so now, with honor. As for me I am going down fighting as the fighting Richardson's have always done."

"Surrender, hell!" yelled Bill, the blood running from his cheek as though an artery was cut, "I've just begun to fight!"

"I'll go down with you, Captain," cried Jack; "while there's a breath of life in me, I'll never surrender!"

"Nor I," "Nor I," "Nor I," came from the rest of the men, whose red blood was still flowing hot in their veins.

There was one who had kept silent during

this new declaration to stand by Captain Richardson to the last. This fellow, whose name I shall not give, stepped forward, his face suffused with shame and his head hanging. He could not look the Captain in the eye.

"The way I figure it, Captain, is that a live man is worth twenty dead men any day. I'm going to surrender. So good-by and good luck."

Captain Richardson said never a word in reply to this fellow who had showed his yellow streak.

"You coward!" shouted Jack, who was mad clear through.

"I ought to bump him off meself," growled Bill, whose impulse was to do it then and there.

"No, boys," admonished the Captain, "he has put up a desperate fight with us and now his life is his own."

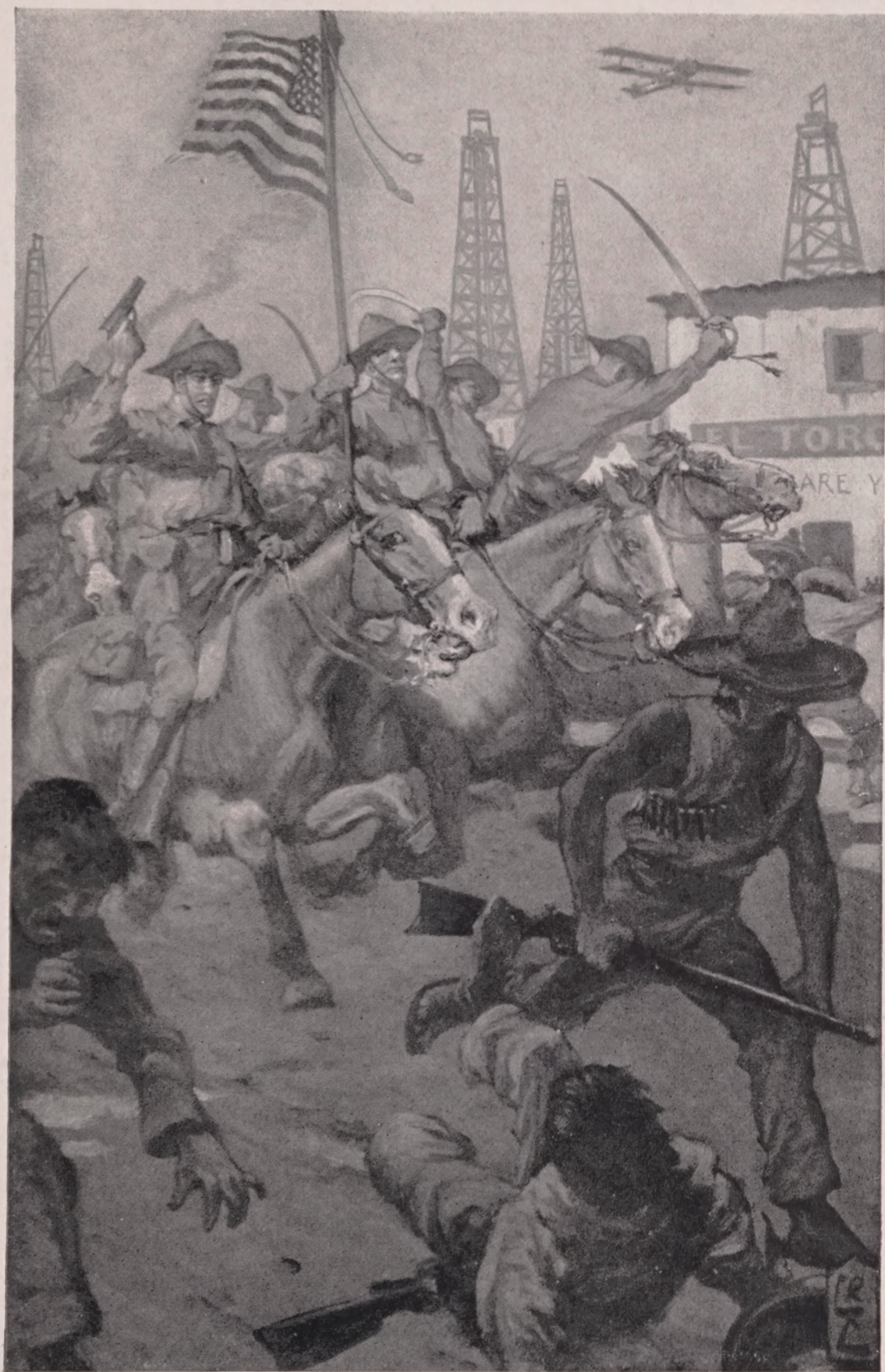
The spiritless fellow tied a white handkerchief to the muzzle of his rifle and walked over to the cornice of the *'dobe*. The *greasers* had put up more ladders and were swarming up them for the final attack. The quitter stepped onto the rung of one of the ladders, waved his white flag and shouted in Spanish, "I surrender! Mercy!"

From the mob below came the broken fire of twenty rifles and the unfortunate fellow pitched forward and crashed to the ground.

It was at that instant the airplane hummed into sight and every face on the roof and on the ground was turned in its direction. The survivors set up a great shout of hope.

"Boys, we are saved," cried Captain Richardson, and scarcely were the words out of his mouth than down the main street of Terrazas came the flying cavalry column with the Stars and Stripes fluttering grandly at its head. It was the finest sight they had ever seen.

At the first glimpse of the airplane the Mexicans became bewildered. Very few of them had ever seen a flying machine before, but they knew full well it was some American contrivance that had come to help cut off their chances of victory which was just within their grasp. They knew rightly, for straight toward the mob surrounding the *'dobe* came the troopers with their sabers flashing and their revolvers spitting fire. It was all Lopez could do to hold his men together. He commanded them to fire on the foe, and this his frightened men did, directing



"MADLY LOPEZ' MOB BROKE AND SCATTERED"—Page 189

their efforts to repulse them, but it was futile, for the biting steel bore down upon them.

Madly, Lopez' mob broke and scattered, and, in less time than it takes to tell it, it was completely routed and in full flight across the fields in every direction, with the hard riding troopers on its heels bent on vengeance.

The few survivors of the terrific fight on the roof of the *'dobe* garrison climbed down, if they were able, or were carried down if wounded, and the latter were immediately taken care of by the medical corps. Though Jack and Bill had been in the thickest of the fight, neither was badly wounded. Jack had received a bad powder burn across his cheek when a *greaser* had tried to blow his head off at point blank range.

Bill was cut in a dozen places, the worst one being a slash that reached almost from his mouth to his ear.

"I'll be a nice lookin' bird when me mudder sees me, now won't I," he soliloquized as the doctor was dressing it.

"It's an honor wound and you'll live to see the day when you're proud of it," the doctor assured him.

"All I've got to say is that old scar-faced

Lopear hasn't got anything on me," he went on sadly.

Most of the other men had not escaped so easily and there was scarcely a man-jack of them, including Captain Richardson, who had not been shot as well as knifed. Altogether it had been a ghastly affair and now that they were safely out of it the boys could not refrain from shuddering as they looked upon their heroic companions who had made the supreme sacrifice, and paid the price with their life's blood.

A number of officers were coming across the street toward them, when suddenly Jack let out a glad cry of recognition.

"Captain Neilson!"

The Captain spotted him.

"Why, hello, Heaton. What in the world are you doing here? I should scarcely have recognized you with that big burn on your cheek. You look as if you had been dragged through a burning knot-hole. Last time I saw you, you were languishing in that mud-hole at Brest."

"Fighting in France was a cinch as against fighting in Mexico if what I've seen here is a

fair sample. Why it's done here now just as it was a hundred years ago. That roof there was a seething hades for the past twenty-four hours. The Alamo couldn't have been any worse, except that Houston's army didn't reach it in time and that your army got here at the eleventh hour and fifty-ninth minute."

"How in heaven's name did you happen to be in Terrazas?" Captain Neilson asked.

Jack told him briefly all about it.

The Captain put his hands gently on his former radio-operator's shoulders. "Just as impetuous and full of adventure as you ever were. By-the-by, what are you going to do now, Jack? Go back to New York and sell oil engines, I suppose."

A speculative look had come into Jack's eyes. "I don't suppose you could use a couple of good troopers in your outfit, could you, Captain?"

"Use them!" exclaimed the Captain, "I should say I could. You know, on coming down here from El Paso my troop was assigned to forage duty and I lost six men, when we were ambushed, by some snipers. We made the scoundrels pay dearly for it, though."

"You know I served as a trooper before I

was assigned to the field artillery and I've got a pal that was a gunner on a submarine and before that he was a cow-puncher. I thought that maybe you'd consider letting Bill and me enlist and so help to fill up your ranks," replied Jack with a grin.

"I surely will," returned Captain Neilson; "I'm only sorry I can't appoint you to be one of my lieutenants, but since I can't do that and inasmuch as two of the men who were picked off by the snipers were sergeants, I'll let you and your partner serve in their places. As soon as this trouble is over you can both return here to Terrazas and finish up this oil business."

Jack and Bill came to rigid attention, clicked their heels and saluted.

"Sir, Sergeants Heaton and Adams thank the Captain for his kindness and wish to know to what troop they are assigned," said Bill with his old service manner.

"*Troop K, 7th Cavalry, Sergeant,*" replied Captain Neilson, acknowledging the salute, and with that the boys about faced and strode off as stiff as two ramrods to don the khaki again.

Over in *K* troop the boys discovered several

old boon companions of theirs who had been in the great World War and after they had drawn their uniforms and equipment from the supply sergeant, they felt quite at home again.

An hour later a messenger from the artillery, which lay posted outside of the town, informed the cavalry commander that they had been directed to move south toward the city of Chihuahua, where mobs of Mexicans were being rapidly massed.

Before leaving, Jack and Bill paid their respects to Captain Richardson and he was surprised and happy to see them in their khaki uniforms. They told him they were again headed south, but this time it was with *Troop K*, and that they would soon return with the bacon. He bade them an affectionate *adios*, and wished them the best of luck.

CHAPTER XI

AMERICAN OIL FOR AMERICANS

TWO months have passed since Jack and Bill dashed to the attack. After that, *K Troop* was detailed to police duty and many were the skirmishes the boys had as the troop ferreted out the bandits and renegades of Mexico from their hiding places in the foothills, and cañons of the Sierra Madre range.

One after another these murderous and lawless gangs of cut-throats were driven from their lairs by the members of *K Troop* and ridden down and exterminated by the ruthless cavalrymen or else forced to surrender; after proper trial they were either imprisoned or executed, according to the extent of their crimes. It was during one of these scouting expeditions into the foothills that the boys had their last encounter with Señor Lopez, the bandit leader and bunco-oil promoter and this time they caught

him flying his true colors which showed him up to be the half-breed scoundrel that he was.

After Lopez had had the victory of the Terrazas 'dobe snatched out of his hands when it was all but his, he made a speedy get-away and rode for dear life to the mountains where he had left one of his gangs. Lopez was different from most Mexicans in that while they are always cocksure of things happening the way they want them to, whether it is winning the capital prize in the national lottery or licking the United States, he (Lopez) always banked on what he would do should affairs not pan out his way.

To this end he kept a couple of mounts in readiness in Terrazas in the event of being hard pressed and besides he knew Chihuahua better than any other man. Thus it was that he disappeared shortly after the airplane winged into sight, for he knew that a detachment of American troops was hard by and to save his own hide he ran away and left to their fate the men who had served under him.

On reaching the Sierra Madre mountains he had no trouble in finding his gang which numbered about a hundred men. He told them that

the American forces had entered Terrazas and that they would have to lay low. But he said never a word about the ignominious defeat of his men at Terrazas.

A couple of weeks after the Americans had passed through Terrazas, Lopez sent out two scouts to learn its whereabouts, if indeed it had any, which he very much doubted. When his scouts, who had barely escaped with their lives, returned and reported to their chief that the bandits had had their eye teeth knocked out at Chihuahua, Lopez was one of the maddest men in Mexico, and he swore eternal vengeance thenceforth on any and all Americans who might cross his path.

This was the way matters stood as *K Troop* was cautiously riding along the floor of one of the cañons in the Sierra Madre range, every man with his senses of sight and hearing on the alert for bandits. Suddenly a hail of bullets was showered on them from above and they knew they were on the right trail. Half way up the cañon wall was a narrow ledge, well protected by boulders from the floor side and by an overhanging cliff from the top. A narrow, winding, ribbon-like ledge leading down

from the top showed how the bandits had gained this vantage point, and it was clear that it was one of their strongholds.

For an instant *K Troop* was in a perilous position and in danger of being completely annihilated, for the bandits kept up an incessant fire upon them from the safety of their ledge. Hastily the troopers dismounted and sought the protection afforded to both horses and men by the boulders which were strewn about the floor of the cañon. Captain Neilson set about to devise some scheme to dislodge the enemy from their vantage point and if possible to capture them.

Night was coming on and the Captain held his men back until it was dark. Then leaving two platoons on the floor of the cañon with instructions to maintain a steady fire upon the bandits, Captain Neilson silently led the third platoon, to which Jack and Bill were assigned, back along the floor until they reached a trail which wound like a snake up the wall. They used every precaution to maintain silence so that they might take the bandits by surprise. The platoon steadily climbed up the trail, reaching the top only a couple of hours before dawn

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and there they rested and partook of cold rations.

Lopez was not to be caught napping for he had taken the precautionary measure of posting sentries; but the sentry on duty at the head of the pass was not as far-seeing or as cautious as his chief with the result that he was very much asleep. When Captain Neilson's scouts spotted him they reported back and then came the question of how best to dispatch him. It would be easy to shoot him but this would not do for the crack of a gun would be heard by Lopez, though he only had an ear and a half to hear it with.

Whatever was done must be done quickly and silently and Bill volunteered to do the job. His training on the streets of New York as a boy came in handy for just as he had often snaked himself through a length of gas or water pipe that was scarcely large enough for him to get into, so now he dropped on the ground at full length and with a series of movements that would make a boa constrictor jealous, he made his serpentine way to the place where the sentry sat sleeping the sleep—not quite of the just, but—of the weary.

Bill reached his side in due time under the protection of the two scouts who had kept a bead on the sentry in the event of his waking up prematurely. As the trooper was on the verge of relieving him of his revolver, who should wake up but Mr. Sentry. He sat dazed for a moment with Bill's big face pressed almost against his but he speedily snapped out of it and did his level best to pull the trigger of his gun to the end that his opponent might have the benefit of its bullet.

The New York boy had a different idea in that he not only wanted the sentry's gun but—and he was most particular about this—he did not want it fired. In the first inning there was as pretty a bit of tumbling as you would see in a circus. Both Bill and the sentry held the gun and each one must needs have it for his very own. They wrestled, gyrated and jiu-jitsued without either one letting go of the gun for an instant. Finally, hard-boiled Bill's strength prevailed and the wily *greaser*, knowing that it was only a question of seconds until he would have to relinquish his grip on it, decided it was time for the second inning. Suddenly he let go with both hands and made a

quick pass for his revolver. In this Bill anticipated him and as he pulled it from his holster the butt of his own gun wielded by his adversary came into contact with his head and he promptly went to sleep again.

It was full daylight now and the troopers skirted along the top of the wall until they struck the trail leading down to the bandits' stronghold. When they were in well secluded positions, Captain Neilson called on Lopez to surrender. The troopers had come upon the bandits like phantom men and, indeed, Lopez and his gang could not have been more surprised if a platoon of spirit troopers had appeared among them.

The strategem had worked to perfection. The two platoons on the cañon floor had kept up a steady fire throughout the night and never once had the bandits suspected that a detachment was slipping around on their rear. When the Captain called on them to surrender, they were in about the same fix as Chilili had been the night Jack let him look into the barrel of his six-gun from the roof. To a man they wheeled around ready to fire on their new enemy, as they thought, but only jagged boul-

ders were visible with the glint of rifle barrels showing over them. It was then that Jack and Bill recognized among them Lopez, the bandit leader, Chilili, and some of the others who had dynamited the train near San Blas.

Again the Captain called to them to lay down their arms. Instead of obeying Lopez fired in the direction the Captain's voice had come from. A volley from the platoon answered his shot and a number of his men dropped in their tracks. Lopez saw that the jig was up and rather than be taken alive he gave vent to a maddened cry and jumped from the ledge to the cañon floor nearly a thousand feet below. It was in this fashion then that their leader Señor José Lopez, criminal jack-of-all-trades and sometime gentleman promoter who had been the cause of so much trouble to Mr. Heaton, as well as to Jack and Bill, met his tragic end.

A dozen crimes had been proved against Chilili and he was tried by a military court, convicted, stood up against a wall and summarily executed. It was altogether too light a punishment considering the robberies he had committed, the number of men he had wantonly killed and the trains he had dynamited.

Shortly after the capture of the Lopez gang *K Troop* was ordered to rejoin its regiment. As the boys had signed up for the duration of the emergency which was over they were mustered out. They had small desire to leave the cavalry though for they had made many friends in the short time they were with it. Another reason they disliked to part with it was because their regiment is the oldest American cavalry regiment in existence to-day.

It has more traditions than any other cavalry regiment for it was with General Custer at his famous last stand of the Little Big Horn, Wyoming. The Sioux Indians, one of the fiercest of the Western tribes, had broken the limits of their reservation and General Custer was sent to drive them back. Because he underestimated the number of Indians, General Custer ordered the charge sounded on June 25, 1876. The *7th Cavalry* charged headlong into the Indians who greatly outnumbered them and during the terrible fight which followed, General Custer fell as did every man in his command. The total casualties were 261 killed and 52 wounded.

But Jack had urgent business to attend to in

Terrazas and of course Bill would go with him. There they found that Mr. Richardson—he had become Mr. again at his own request—had his plant in full swing and that Uncle Sam had taken charge of the big German wireless station. The wells of the *Mexican Consolidated Company, Limited*, were in exactly the same condition as when the boys had left Terrazas.

Jack had previously wired his father of the true condition of affairs of the *Mexican Consolidated* wells and the deceit that had been practiced upon the stockholders by Lopez. Mr. Heaton had in the meantime gotten in touch with the American stockholders and they had appointed a committee, of which he was the chairman, to take charge of the Company's affairs until it could be reorganized.

On learning of Jack's return to Terrazas, Mr. Heaton wired him that the committee had appointed him *manager pro tem*, which, as he explained to Bill, meant for the time being, to straighten out matters at the wells. Jack in turn informed his father of his acceptance of this responsible position and went to Mr. Richardson for advice. The latter had pretty well

recovered by this time from the effects of the valiant fight he had put up atop the 'dobe.

"I congratulate you, Jack. And so now you are the manager of the *Mexican Consolidated*. What a pleasure it will be to have American neighbors instead of that Mexican crowd. I wonder what became of Señor Lopez. I have not seen him since the day he was directing the attack on the 'dobe. He was neither killed nor captured but simply disappeared."

"You won't need to worry about Lopez any more, Mr. Richardson," and then Jack related to him the manner of Lopez' passing.

Mr. Richardson nodded his approval.

"He had nerve all right; you must give him credit for that," said Jack.

"Yes," replied Mr. Richardson, and he had ability, too. If he had only been content to have run the *Consolidated* wells honestly, he would have been a rich man enjoying life to-day. Well, egad, I am right glad we are rid of him for all time. Now, Jack, just what do you propose to do as your first step toward rehabilitating the *Mexican Consolidated*?"

"That's exactly what I want your advice on," replied Jack. "It's this way, Mr. Rich-

ardson; my father's investment is a losing deal for him every day the wells are idle, and I propose to get them in working order as quickly as I possibly can. As soon as they are producing again and things are ship-shape they can send a manager down from New York and then I can go back home."

"Why not stay right here yourself? There are worse towns on the map than Terrazas and now that the United States has cleaned up Mexico, it will be a right decent place to live in," urged Mr. Richardson.

"As for climate, I never saw the like of it in my life. It's just one continuous round of sunshine and summer and I like our own people here. But Bill is getting uneasy. It's funny how these born and bred New Yorkers always want to get back to that little old Bagdad on the Hudson. How about it, Bill?"

"I'd rather be a lamp-post on Broadway, than the mayor of Terrazas," was Bill's way of saying what he thought of the proposition.

"But while I am here I'm counting on your help, Mr. Richardson. Now, what's the first thing for me to do? You know that being the

manager of an oil well plant isn't my regular business, but I'm not going to fluke it."

"Suppose we go over to the *Consolidated* wells and take a look at them. We can see then just what is needed."

On looking over the ground they discovered that all of the machinery had been removed, though the late Señor Lopez' mahogany office furniture had not been disturbed.

"Suppose the big Mexican guy that Lopez sold the wells to should show up, what then?" asked Bill, to the end that he might have some idea as to how to proceed.

"He doesn't figure in it at all any more," laughed Jack; "any Mexican official that thinks he's got a claim on this property can take it up with the United States Court. As a matter of fact, I don't believe that the wells were ever transferred or that the alleged Mexican official will ever be heard from."

"My viewpoint is that Señor Lopez was the Mexican official he was always talking about and that he sold the wells to himself," explained Mr. Richardson. "Now put these items down. You will need a steam boiler of the kind known as the *oil country locomotive*

type; a horizontal engine of the *link* type; a hand wheel for distributing the power produced by your steam engine and boiler, and, last of all, seventeen pump jacks to work the pumps in the well tubings."

"I suppose that Lopez has plugged up all of the wells and that I will have to *shoot* them to start them flowing again."

"If I were you, Jack, I would pull the tubing from the wells, take out the plugged sections and replace them with new tubing. In dynamiting the wells, or *shooting* them, as you call it, you are liable to do much damage. In pulling the tubing you will save much expense, though it will take more time," advised Mr. Richardson.

Having made an inventory of all the materials that were needed to open the wells, Jack wired his father and got back the reply to order whatever was necessary from El Paso. In the meantime, the boys were as busy as nailers getting a force of men together and for these he had to send to various towns in Texas, although Mr. Richardson loaned him enough of his own men to start the work of pulling the tubes and repairing them.

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This work took up the best part of a fortnight and Bill, who had worked for the *Holland Submarine Company*, made a very valuable man. And then came a lull while they were waiting for the consignment of pumping jacks and other machinery and time weighed very heavily on their young minds.

Bill, who had been in the Navy, and had set foot in nearly every country on the face of the earth except South America, was at that not exactly what you would call a *cosmopolite*, that is a globe-trotter, who liked one place as well as another and is equally at home wherever he happened to be. All towns looked alike to Bill except "Noo York," and now that peace had been declared and there was nothing but common, every-day hard work to be done he was pining to return home.

When Jack was not otherwise engaged, he sat at his former foe's mahogany desk and took it easy in his swivel chair, the like of which, I dare say, was not to be duplicated in the whole province of Chihuahua. Know you, too, that it was Bill's habit to come in and cock his feet up on the polished surface of the afore-said mahogany desk.

"Bill, I insist that you either take your feet off of Señor Lopez' desk or take off your spurs first. Can't you see you're scratching it all up?" Jack put it to his pal fairly.

"Señor Lopear doesn't care, does he?" asked Bill dryly and blinking as though the sun was shining in his eyes, but making no move to comply with the manager's request. "He hasn't any use for the desk where he is now, has he?"

"Probably not," retorted Jack, "but what's the use of spoiling an otherwise perfectly good mahogany desk."

"If Lopear doesn't care, I don't see why you should take it so to heart," groused Bill as he pulled his feet down and left two parallel lines cut deep in the surface. "I don't like these high-toned fixin's nohow."

"You don't see Mr. Richardson putting his feet on his desk, or me putting my feet on my desk, do you?" asked Jack.

"*Your* desk! A minute ago it belonged to old Lopear and now its yours," went on Bill in a very peeved tone of voice.

"Well, it would belong to Lopez if he was here, but as he's not here and as I use it, I say, figuratively, *my* desk!"

"From the tumble Lopear took in the cañon I says he's a mighty long ways from bein' here; that's what I says," Bill came back at his partner. Then the old primordial impulse came to the surface and he blurted out, "Say, bo, if me and you wasn't pals, I'd make you put up your dukes, see!"

"The trouble with you, Bill, is that you take offense too quickly."

"I never took a fence in me life," Bill protested vehemently. "I picked up half-a-ton of coal onct, when the hind wheel caved in under a bloke's wagon and afore he could fix it up. It was a godsend to us, I'm tellin' you, Jack, for me mudder was sick and we'd no fire for tree days——"

"Wait a minute," said Jack; "what's that backing in on our siding? It looks like our pumping jacks at last!"

Sure enough, there was a train of flat cars backing up on the siding of the *Mexican Consolidated Company, Limited*, they bore the company's label, and they were loaded with the long looked-for pumping machinery. With shouts of joy, Jack and Bill tore out of the office, forgetting their dissatisfaction with things

in general and ceasing the small bickering they were engaged in. Hardly had the cars come to a full stop before they had a gang of cholo-boys at work unloading them.

Then they and their men began to assemble the pumps, move them into place and set them on their foundations. It was a matter of another ten days or two weeks, before the machinery was all set up properly and the wells connected in.

Then one morning bright and early Jack pronounced everything O. K. and ready to work. He brought Mr. Richardson over to watch the reopening of the *Mexican Consolidated* wells under the direction of Americans. When Jack gave the signal, Bill, who was acting as chief engineer, turned on the power, the walking beams began their rhythmic strokes and the pumps of all of the seventeen wells were drawing oil in a steady flow and discharging it into the great storage tanks.

"Bravo, boys!" cried Mr. Richardson; you have certainly done the trick."

"We couldn't have succeeded at all without your help," said Jack, "because neither of us knew anything about operating oil machinery."

“Nonsense, my boy, what I did was little enough. Why, if it had not been for you and that radio message you sent to El Paso, I wouldn't have been here to-day. So I guess that you are more than entitled to any little help I may have given you. There is only one thing now that I suggest and that is to change the infernal name of your company.”

That put a bug in Bill's brain. He was always greatly impressed by the huge American flag that floated so proudly in the breeze over the top of the oil tank of the Terrazas plant. The first thing that Mr.—the then Captain—Richardson had done when he and his men had been driven to the roof of the *'dobe* was to hoist the American flag and they had kept Lopez' mob so busy they could not pull it down.

There it bravely floated, bullet riddled, when the *7th Cavalry* dashed into town. That precious flag now rests in a glass case in the head office of the *Terrazas Company* in New York, as a memorial of another American victory, and a monster star-spangled banner has been waving over the Terrazas plant in its place ever since.

“I don't suppose you've got another Amer-

ican flag anywhere around?" Bill asked Mr. Richardson on the quiet.

"Yes, I always keep a couple in reserve. Why, Bill?"

"I thought as how if you'd give me the borry of one I'd hoist it above our Company's works," explained Bill.

"Come with me, son, and you shall have one as a gift," replied the Terrazas manager.

A few minutes later Mr. Richardson called Jack's attention to Bill, who with a couple of his men were climbing up the highest derrick on the place.

"What's the big idea?" questioned Jack.

"Wait and see," was the reply.

On reaching the top Bill lashed the beautiful new flag to a spar and the latter, in turn, he fixed to the top-most point of the derrick. All of the men had gathered to watch the performance and when Bill flung the grand old bunting to the soft Mexican breeze, three mighty cheers went up. *And long may it wave!*

A few evenings later a train pulled in from El Paso and from it stepped a man of mature years and wide experience in the oil fields. He

made his way over to the office of the *American Consolidated Oil Company*, asked for Mr. Heaton and introduced himself to Jack as Mr. Robbins, the new manager. After going over his credentials Jack turned the plant over to him.

The boys were tickled almost to death for it meant that they were, at last, relieved of all further responsibility and were free to go home whenever they wanted to. Mr. Robbins went all over the plant with them and he was amazed at the tale he heard.

“Boys, I couldn’t possibly have done better myself. You fellows have worked wonders here. Now take me over and introduce me to Mr. Richardson for he is the kind of a man I want to know.”

Late in the afternoon of the next day, Mr. Robbins said that the first shipment of oil was ready to be sent north to be refined, and that the wells might now be said to be operating in first class shape.

The boy’s work was done and well done. The time had come when they were ready to leave Terrazas but this time they were headed north—for home. The hardest part of it though was saying good-by to Mr. Richardson.

“Sorry, mighty sorry, you are going to leave us so soon,” quoth that prince of men. “If at any time you ever need a friend call on me. But from what I have already seen of you boys, I do not think you will ever be likely to need the assistance of an old hulk like me.”

Mr. Richardson and Mr. Robbins accompanied Jack and Bill to the little station, for it was train time. The latter looked anxiously down the track and complained because the train was thirty-seven seconds late. Very different they looked from the youngsters who rode into Terrazas a few months before in saddles, for Bill had expurgated his spurs and they wore the best store clothes that money could buy in Terrazas. But at El Paso they hoped to make another change for the better.

Were these young soldiers of fortune anxious to get back to little old New York? Yea, bo, verily they were, and so would you have been, had you passed through the gruelling adventures that they had in order to turn a bunco oil company into one that paid dividends and to make Mexico a safe place to travel through or do business in.

CHAPTER XII

A BIG TIME IN THE OLD TOWN

FROM Terrazas to El Paso, from El Paso to St. Louis and from St. Louis to the old town. It doesn't look very far on the map, or sound like it in miles, but if you ever make the trip you'll know that it is a long, long ways. For four days and nights the clickety-click of the wheels on the rails sang but one song in the ears of the boys and that was, "We're going home! We're going home!"

Shortly after the train pulled out of El Paso they went into the dining car. They were a striking pair of youngsters as they sat there, their faces dyed the color of old mahogany by the fierce heat of the semi-tropical sun and fixed by the mordant of the desert winds. The dining car waiter, so black that he was almost blue, hovered over them, attending to their every want as if they had been a pair of dukes

instead of just plain Jack and his side-kick Bill.

At last he could restrain his curiosity no longer and after a considerable amount of stammering and several unsuccessful attempts he was able to throw the thing that was on his mind from him.

“ ‘Scuse me, boss, but ain’t you all done been afightin’ dem *greasers* down yar in Mexico,” he drawled apologetically, addressing Jack.

Upon Jack’s reply in the affirmative he fairly beamed on them.

“Dawggone it,” he smiled, showing two rows of glistening bony processes that would have made a wonderful *ad* for a tooth-paste company, “Ah knowed it as soon as I clapped mah lookers on you folks. Suh, Ah cain tell a trooper a mile away. Ah served two enlistments on the bowdah mahself.”

“How does it happen you’re not in the service now?” Bill asked him.

“Well, sir, it was this away, boss; you see there’s a little yaller gal down N’Orleans way and this away Ah gets a chance to see her every other trip Ah makes. One trip Ah runs from El Paso to St. Louis an’ the nex’ trip Ah

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runs from El Paso to N'Orleans. Dawggone it Ah wishes Ah was makin' dat trip now, 'deed Ah do."

"Don't worry, Jasper, she'll be there when you get back," Jack said encouragingly.

"Yassir, yassir, but dere's a mean, low-down jaundice-cull'ed barbah dat's all the time pesteratin' 'roun' mah gal when Ah'm on de road, and Ah suspecks dat some day Ah'll find dat ornry niggah's done galloped away with mah honeysuckle down Mobile. Dawggone dat niggah's hide nohow!" and with that he dexterously balanced a tray of dishes on one hand above his head and trotted down the aisle to the kitchen.

"Tough luck," said Jack, sympathetically.

"I had a goil onct," reflected Bill; "it was when I was in the Navy. All the *gobs* was gettin' letters from goils out in Oshkosh, Kokomo and all of the rest of the burgs in the United States. A Jane starts in to writin' to me from Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and she wrote me the swellest letters I ever read, bar none, full of love, sympathizin' like and gaff in general. That's the goil for me, says I to myself, and so

as soon as I could get a ten days' shore leave I hops on a rattler and goes to Tuscaloosa.

"I arrives one night and when I gets to her domicile I finds a beautiful maiden about the color of the skin of a boiled ham awaitin' for me.

" 'You're not Miss Lucie Lalapaluza, are you?' I asks feelin' quite some pale around the gills."

" 'Ah reckons Ah is,' she said, actin' kittenish.

" 'But you're not *the* Miss Lalapaluza which wrote me this bunch of letters, are you?' I asked her flat.

" 'Yas, that is, mah Sunday school teacher done writ them fo' me.'

" 'Good night!' says I and with that I ske-daddled out into the darkness and I have not been seen since in Tuscaloosa."

"Tough luck," reiterated Jack, but this time laughing heartily.

"Sierra Blanca! Sierra Blanca!" yelled the porter.

"This may be Sierra Blanca all right, as that shine calls it, but all I can see is a giant cactus and a water tank," ventured Bill.

"It isn't much to look at now," admitted

Jack, who was also trying to locate the town, "but I suppose that oil, gas and steam wells will be found in this section some day if they drill deep enough, and even electricity wells if some good promoter like Lopez should take it up. It must be a town, Bill, for there stands a Yuma Indian."

"I never heard tell of an electricity well," admitted Bill, but then there were a good many things in heaven and on earth he had not heard of.

"You didn't?" exclaimed Jack in feigned amazement. "Then you've missed half of your young life, Bill."

Now Bill could *savvy* almost anything except this *electricity stuff*, as he called it, but he had sense enough to know that he was entirely *non compos mentis* when it came to the theory of that form of energy and matter. When it had to do with working a piece of apparatus such as a magnet, a solenoid or an electric motor he had to be satisfied to throw the switch and let *the juice* do the work; as to how it did it, aye, that was the big mystery to him. He could grasp how water, or even gas, flowing *inside* a pipe, acted but electricity, which Jack had

told him flowed on the *outside* of a wire, in his seat of understanding was the absolute zero of possibilities.

Of course, there is no such thing as an electricity well, but Jack liked to have a little joke once in a while and about the only way he could put one over was at the expense of Bill's non-intellectual powers. So he bethought to tell him about an electricity well a promoter had sunk in the Orange mountains near Montclair, a good many years before, and in which many a poor sucker had sunk his good money.

"A heavy insulated wire," he told Bill in all seriousness, "projected from the top of the mountain, or hill it would be called in the Golden West, and *leads*, or wires, were run off from this which were connected to electric lamps, motors and other electrical equipment. All that was needed was to throw the switch and the electric current generated in the earth would flow, and light, heat and power were produced. Lopez was a *piker* as against this New York promoter with his electricity well."

"Where in Sam Hill did the *juice* come from?" Bill wanted to know.

"From the bowels of the earth, just like water and gas and steam."

Bill sat blinking and thinking.

"You see," explained Jack when he had Bill going, "that the promoter had had a tunnel dug in the side of the mountain and in this he had installed a good sized power plant consisting of a gasoline engine and a dynamo. The wire from the top of the mountain led down to it and the return circuit was made through the earth and—there you have your electricity well."

"Why the son-of-a-gun!" howled Bill, "he and Lopear would have made a good team."

And so the boys told stories and swapped yarns all the way along the line, when they were not asleep, just to pass the time away.

"By jinks, it will be good to get back again. Do you know, Bill, I think I'll stay home for awhile, where I can sleep in a good bed, eat good meals, go to good shows and walk down the street without having to keep my eye peeled for fear some *greaser* is going to ambush me and make a sieve of my body."

"You said it cull," replied Bill unconsciously relapsing into his gas-house dialect, now that

he was nearing the roar and the clamor of the great city of seven million souls that he knew and loved as only Steve Brodie knew and loved it.

Jack had often noted this peculiarity of speech of his pal. Aboard ship he talked in the nautical terms of a *gob*, in New York like a rough neck from the Tenderloin and when in the desert wastes like a pioneer plainsman. But since Bill's experience with the world had been a varied one this trick of appropriate talk was not to be wondered at.

"From what I have seen of the United States and the Southern part of Texas," went on Bill, "little old Noo York is good enough for me."

At last the heavy, smooth-riding, all-steel train pulled into the Market Street Station in Newark, which is only a little way from Montclair, and the boys were near enough to New York to feel that they were home again. Bill had agreed that he would stop off with Jack and have dinner with him and his folks, though he felt that he was not doing quite the right thing by not going on over and seeing his mother. To square matters he sent her a wire.

At Newark they got into a jitney and were

hustled away for Montclair as fast as a four-cylinder engine, Texas gasoline and a reckless *chauffeur* could drive them.

"I'd hate to be killed in one of these dinkey tin lizards here in Newark after all we've been through with in Mexico," quoth Bill, hanging on for dear life and with his Adam's apple a couple of inches too high in his throat.

"There's no danger, Bill," Jack assured him. "Newark has a population of nearly half a million and there's only ten smash-ups on an average a day, so you see the chances of our getting hurt are practically *nil*."

"*Nil* bein' the word," gasped Bill.

Jack had not wired his folks that he was coming for there are so many slips twixt the canteen and the edges of the mouth, that he preferred to take them by surprise, rather than to disappoint them. The taxi wheeled up to the curb and stopped as short as a well-trained broncho. The boys jumped out of the machine and fairly burst into the house.

Once inside, Jack tore through the hall and parlor and into the library, leaving Bill to take care of himself. There, surely enough, as he hoped to find him was his father seated at his

desk, so interested in his task that he had not been aware of the rumpus the boys had kicked up like a couple of Texas steers in a fine art foundry.

Look who's here, Dad!" Jack called out.

Mr. Heaton wheeled round in his chair and let out a shout of glad surprise.

"Jack!—Safely home again!"

Then without waiting to say more, the usually calm and collected Mr. Heaton jumped up and drew his son to him. The next instant he had relinquished him from his embrace, rushed from the room upsetting such furniture as might impede the progress of his mad flight and called upstairs to his good wife:

"Come down quick, Mother; I've got something for you!"

"Land sakes!" came back Mrs. Heaton's soft, pleasant voice, "I will be down right away."

Then Mr. Heaton caught sight of Bill who was standing nervously in the parlor, looking around without seeing anything and twisting his brand-new felt hat all out of shape.

"Hel-lo, Bill," cried the overjoyed old gentleman, rushing in and trying to shake the young

man's hand and slap him on the back at the same time, which contrarywise motions are next to a physical impossibility, as you will agree if you will but try it once.

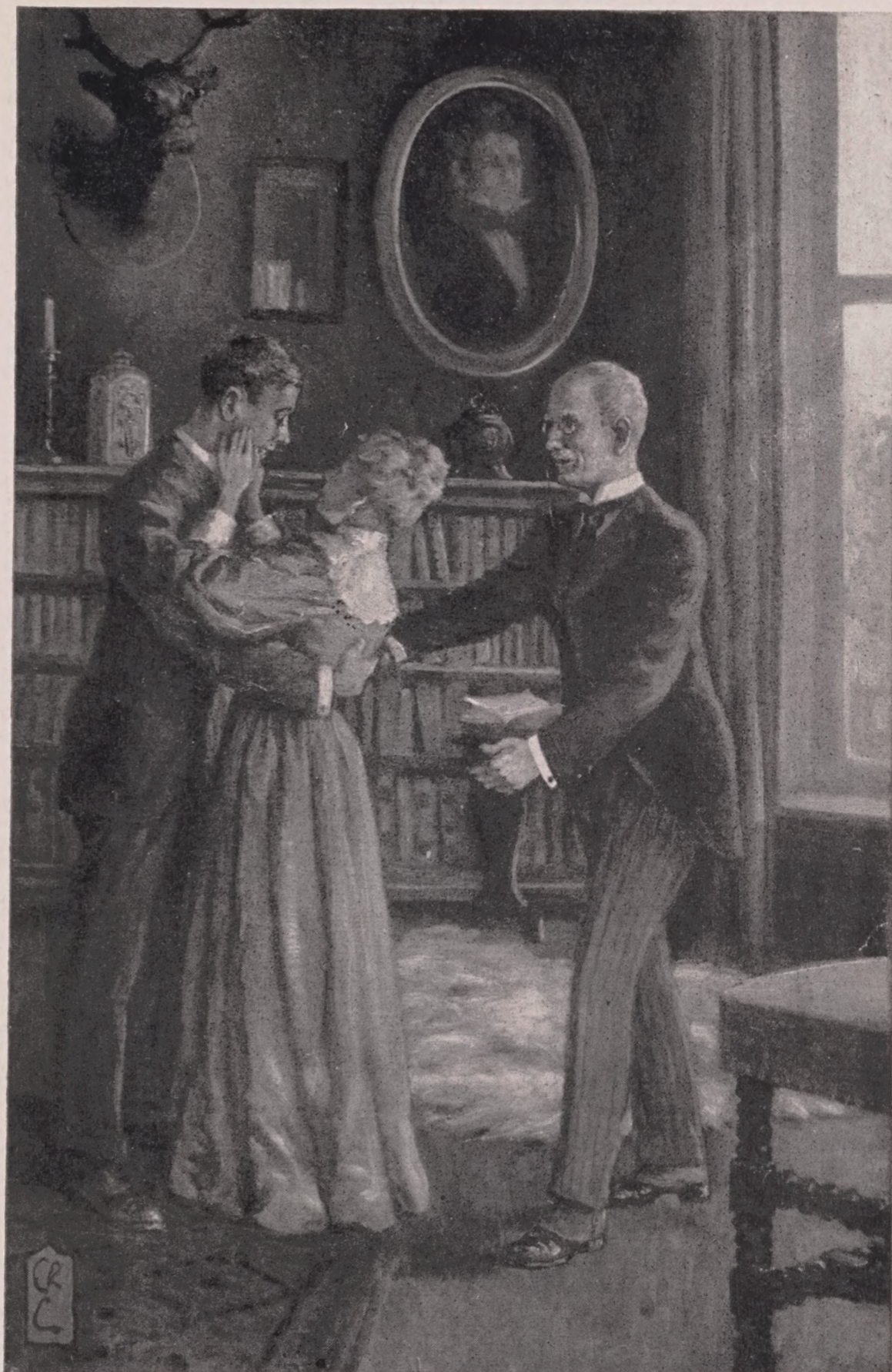
"Thank you, sir!" spoke up poor Bill bravely and saluting as though Mr. Heaton was an officer of high rank.

Then Jack's mother, a sweet, gentle soul, came in and the welcome was gone all through with again. Mrs. Heaton clasped her big boy to her heart and vowed she would never let him go away again. She was always glad to see Bill, too, for she had come to know that underneath his rough exterior there beat a heart of gold.

Bill, though, was dreadfully uncomfortable, for a display of any kind of the softer emotions was a thing to be truly dreaded.

"Excuse me, boys, and I'll have Mabel kill a young frying chicken for dinner, for I know you must be hungry," she said always thinking of how best to please these two young stalwarts.

"Can't I kill Mabel—no, I mean the chicken—Mrs. Heaton," suggested Bill, mixing things up as usual when he was in high-toned society.



"MRS. HEATON VOWED SHE WOULD NEVER LET HIM GO AWAY AGAIN"—Page 226



“No, Bill,” explained Mrs. Heaton, without ever pretending to hear his bad break, “Mabel is an expert at catching and killing fowls.”

She departed to give the maid-of-all-work her instructions and—*pronto*—the boys heard the unfortunate bird squawking in mortal terror as Mabel chased it round the chicken-coop.

“Jack, is this the same eat-’em-alive Mabel what you met down in the jungles of Brazil, that you’ve got policin’ up at your home here?” Bill asked on the Q. T.

“Hardly,” replied his pal laughingly, “this Mabel is one of those calomel-yellow pieces of femininity that comes up from the Bahamas and speaks better English than any school teacher in Montclair. Old King Oopla’s daughter, Princess Mabel, whom I once had the doubtful pleasure of knowing in the wilds along the Amazon, is *wearing* feathers, while our Mabel here is *picking* feathers, or at least from the way my stomach feels I hope she is.”

“Now, boys,” said Mr. Heaton, when Jack’s mother had returned, “tell us all about it. Don’t leave out a detail for we want to hear the whole story from the time you left until right up to the present minute.”

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The boys looked at each other but neither spoke. Jack waited for Bill and Bill waited for Jack to outline a thumb-nail sketch of their adventures. Since Jack remained silent Bill felt that the etiquette of the occasion made it incumbent upon him to do so.

“You see, folks, it was this way: there was tree of us in the gang, me, Jack here, and Captain Richardson——”

“Why, Dad, you got my telegrams, didn’t you?” Jack broke in, without letting Bill get any further. His father nodded in the affirmative, and his modest son continued, “Well, there’s very little more to tell.”

“Dash it all, Jack, you know that’s not the part of it mother and I want to hear about,” replied his father. “What we want you to tell us about is your adventures down there in the land of cactuses, *greasers* and bandits.”

Jack was always questioned in this fashion on his return home from his various travels and during his recitals of incidents, episodes and adventures they hung upon his every word for they were mighty proud of their son’s heroism and ability. On the other hand Jack felt when he was telling about events in which he had fig-

ured that it sounded too much as though he was trying to *crack himself up*, as he expressed it, and so his father had to ply him with questions before he could get the full story out of him.

Half-an-hour later the slightly tinted daughter of Ham interrupted Jack's tale by announcing dinner.

"You were saying, Jack, that you and Bill were held up just outside of Juarez, but you didn't say how you escaped," said his mother.

And Bill replied: "You see it was this way, Mrs. Heaton. Jack shot just about one-fifth of a second before Chilili did and the *greaser* simply tumbled out of his saddle."

Mr. Heaton's eyes bulged out in astonishment and delight and Mrs. Heaton gave vent to a gasp of mingled surprise and joy, not because their son had shot the bandit but because by being the quicker he had saved himself from being shot. At dinner, which the boys declared the best they had ever eaten, bar none, Jack finished telling about their exploits in Mexico.

"That scoundrel Lopez was about as big a villian as I ever heard of outside of story books," said Mr. Heaton. "I know that he came within an ace of ruining me and many

others. Now, boys, I have a little surprise for you. There's a meeting of the directors of the *American Consolidated Oil Company* this afternoon and I want my associates to meet you boys.

"All right, Dad, we'll be glad to make their acquaintance and see how they stack up. Eh, Bill?"

"Aw, say, Mr. Heaton," mumbled Bill more abashed than ever at this new and unexpected turn of affairs, "do I have to go?"

"Most certainly you do, Bill," insisted Mr. Heaton, "but you don't need to get alarmed. Certainly a fellow who had the courage to fight Lopez and his gang of desperadoes need have no fear of facing a dozen old codgers like us."

While Mr. Heaton was getting ready to drive over to New York Jack took Bill into the library and showed him the wall safe where he had first encountered Lopez.

"That was the beginning of it all, Bill."

"And that big dinner was about the end of me," roared Bill, who showed signs of being uncomfortable under the belt.

"All ready, boys, jump in," Jack's father an-

nounced, and together they went over to New York in his new car. The country through which he drove them was beautiful and refreshing and the boys could not lose sight of the fact that there was water everywhere.

"If we could get the Hudson River down into Chihuahua we'd make John D. Rockefeller's millions look like a *peseta*, what say, Bill?"

"Yep and nope. The Rio Casa Grande is good enough for them *greasers*. We want the Hudson River right here, for Noo York wouldn't be Noo York without it," epitomized Bill; "and without Noo York life wouldn't be worth livin'."

Landing at Cortlandt street from the ferry, which had transferred them across the Hudson from Jersey City, Mr. Heaton skillfully piloted the big machine in and out of the maze of traffic with all of the confidence of a professional *chauffeur*, until they reached the Equitable Building where the new offices of the *American Consolidated Oil Company* were located.

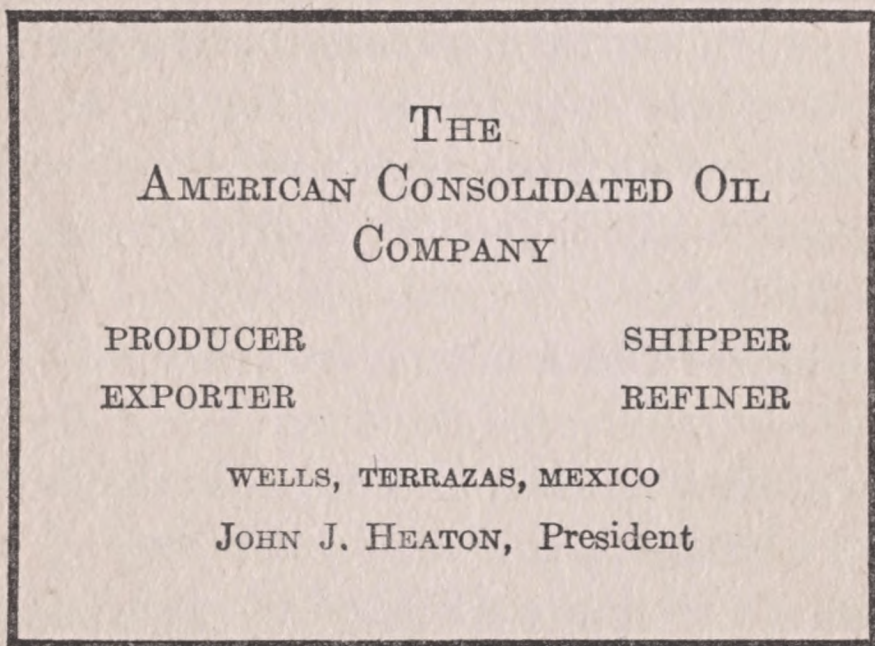
What with the dinner, the ferry and the traffic they were somewhat late, and consequently it was a quarter after three before they took the

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express elevator to the twenty-second floor on which were the company's offices. As they shot upward with the speed of a rocket it put Bill in mind of old times in the Navy.

"It's like bein' on a submarine chaser in a heavy sea," he sang out.

The elevator came to a quick but gentle stop and on stepping out, there, staring them in the face was this legend on the door:



Mr. Heaton preceded the boys and opened the door for them. They entered and passed through a reception room where a pretty little blonde telephone operator, with one of those smiles that wins, vouchsafed the information to

Mr. Heaton that the directors were already there and waiting for him.

"You can't beat these Noo York goils for looks," Bill whispered to Jack.

Mr. Heaton ushered in the boys, but it wouldn't be fair to either side to record what Bill thought of them or what they thought of him on first sight. What they saw was a rather heavy-set young fellow, with a full face, blue eyes, large nose, firm mouth with thin lips and a protruding chin, all of which was topped off by a thick head of brownish red hair, while the scar of a fresh knife gash extended diagonally across his left cheek. They were not at all impressed with his appearance.

What Bill saw were ten gentlemen, all of them past the prime of life in so far as age and physical well being went but whose grey matter was yet intact and capable of functioning to a high degree when it came to making money for themselves, provided their interests lay in a country where law and order protected them. Some of them had iron gray hair, others had white hair and a few had no hair at all. All, however, were dressed in correct afternoon attire and immaculately groomed, while a couple of the

sportier old men wore carnations in their buttonholes. They were seated around a huge and massive mahogany table.

"Too bad you haven't got your spurs on, Bill," whispered Jack.

"Can that stuff," whispered Bill back, bewildered.

As Mr. Heaton, Jack and Bill entered, the directors, dignified as bald eagles and barred owls, rose slowly and bowed ceremoniously.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Heaton, "this is my son, Jack, and his partner, Professor William Adams, to whom all of us are indebted for their bravery and heroic services in saving our oil wells in Terrazas for us."

Again the portly gentlemen bowed and seated themselves. Jack was tremendously interested, and Bill felt about as much at home as a gentleman who is sent to propagate a system of faith among the Fiji Islands and who in turn finds himself in a cauldron when the head fire-lighter touches off the tinder under it, preparing to make *chow* of him. The proceedings were entirely different from anything Bill had ever seen or heard about and both men and meeting were

entirely out of his class, or at least that's the way he felt about it.

"To us here, far from the scene of hardships and bloodshed which these two boys have just returned from," continued Mr. Heaton, "the reopening of the *Consolidated* wells under American ownership and management may not seem to be a task of any great magnitude, but could you have been on the ground at Terrazas you would appreciate and realize the tremendous hazards they encountered and the magnificent work they have done.

"I now propose to tell you the story of what they did and how they did it and when I have finished I am sure that you will all agree with me that these two boys deserve not only our heartfelt thanks for saving our investments in the Terrazas oil fields but something more substantial."

With that Mr. Heaton launched into the story and for a solid hour held his fellow directors spellbound in their seats.

"Finally, gentlemen, I move that we donate to Mr. Adams here and to Jack a small amount of the stock which they have redeemed from worthless paper at the risk of their lives. I will

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pass this paper around and will each of you be good enough to write down the amount of stock that you think their services merit."

Mr. Heaton signed his name first and after it he marked down \$2,000. One after another the directors received the paper, pledged themselves to contribute a certain amount of their personal stock in *The American Consolidated Oil Company*, and returned it to Mr. Heaton. The total amount was short of \$20,000 by \$1,500. Running his eyes rapidly down the list Mr. Heaton discovered where one of the directors had donated only \$500.

"You'll have to raise your *ante*, Joe," he called out much to that party's discomfort, who had thought to escape unnoticed with the small amount. "Why you hold more stock in this company than any of the rest of us and yet you've only pledged \$500."

The corpulent financier referred to stroked his beautiful white side-whiskers carefully and with reverence, thought for a second and then smiled.

"That's a mistake, John," he crawfished, "I meant to have made it \$5,000, but I guess I must have forgotten to add the last cipher."

With that the meeting broke up and the directors shook hands warmly with the boys and all fell into easy conversation, much to Bill's surprise.

The financier whose shrewd policies had crept into his pledge was, as Bill afterward learned, a real flesh and blood animal and not a *human icicle* as he had at first thought.

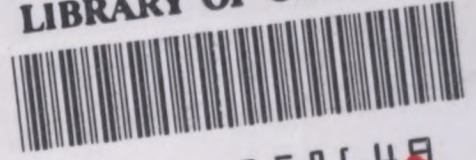
"I say, Professor Adams, I understand from Mr. Heaton that you sometimes teach physical culture. Do you think you could do anything for me?"

Bill looked him over with the critical eye of a doctor, or a prize-fighter, felt of his back and chest, pumped his arms, and raised and lowered his legs.

"Sure I can," Bill said encouragingly. "I'll make a new man of you in six weeks. But I don't want to start in right away because I've got so much money I don't know what to do with it unless I buy a baseball club or a string of ponies. But I'll take care of youse providin' that from now on you'll lay off that Professor stuff, because from now on I'm just plain Bill Adams, man-about-town and gentleman of leisure. See?"

THE END.

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